

**‘My best friend was the interpreter!’:
An Exploration of Effective Working Relationships
and Strategies for the Inclusion of Deaf Students
in Irish Higher Education Settings**

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Outputs	Both tools were primarily used to support various aspects of academic writing, including spelling, grammar, clarity, sentence structure, flow, and stylistic feedback. They also provided suggestions for alternative phrasing to enhance readability. In addition, Copilot was used to address specific queries, serving as an alternative to conventional internet search engines.
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Iterations	These tools were used iteratively, with ProWritingAid being a long-term support tool and Copilot used regularly to refine paragraphs after initial drafting.
Reflection	As a Deaf person, I occasionally encounter challenges in maintaining consistent tense usage and achieving conciseness in written English. The use of ProWritingAid and Copilot has been a reasonable accommodation support for my academic writing.

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Finally, I dedicate this research to my mother, Angela. I hope I have made you proud, Mum.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CDS	Centre for Deaf Studies
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DAWN	Disability Advisors Working Network
DCU	Dublin City University
DHH	Deaf and Hard of Hearing
DSS	Disability Support Service
FSD	Fund for Students with Disabilities
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution(s)
IDS	Irish Deaf Society
ISL	Irish Sign Language
RISLI	Register for Irish Sign Language Interpreters
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SLIS	Sign Language Interpreting Service
SWD	Students with Disabilities
UD	Universal Design
UDL	Universal Design for Learning

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Abstract

‘My best friend was the interpreter!’: An Exploration of Effective Working Relationships and Strategies for the Inclusion of Deaf Students in Irish Higher Education Settings

Caroline McGrotty

This study explores the dynamics of effective working relationships and strategies for inclusion of deaf students in Irish higher education settings, with a particular focus on the triadic relationship between deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers. Despite national policy efforts to widen participation for students with disabilities, deaf and hard of hearing students remain underrepresented and face unique challenges.

Through qualitative interviews with 21 participants comprising deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers, this research employs reflexive thematic analysis to examine lived experiences across five key themes: student inclusion, relational dynamics, classroom environment, intricacies of educational interpreting, and capacity building.

Findings reveal that meaningful inclusion is shaped not only by the availability of access supports but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships, readiness, and pedagogical practices. Effective working relationships are characterised by role clarity, collaboration, trust, and mutual respect. Co-enrolled groups of deaf students appear to enhance visibility and foster more inclusive teaching practices, while single deaf student settings often result in isolation and reduced participation. The study also highlights the need for systemic improvements in interpreter training, lecturer awareness, and institutional support structures.

Recommendations are offered across micro, meso, and macro levels, advocating for structured transition programmes, inclusive pedagogical training, expanded funding models, and clearer role definitions. Ultimately, the research underscores that inclusion is a dynamic, relational process requiring sustained commitment from all stakeholders within the higher education system.

Keywords: *Irish Sign Language, Higher Education, Interpreters, Deaf Students, Lecturers, Relationships, Inclusive Pedagogy, Disability, Access Supports.*

A Note on Language

As a preface to this thesis, I want to begin by clarifying the key terminology used throughout, remaining mindful of the ways in which language is deeply intertwined with individual identity.

First, I want to acknowledge the distinction commonly made between *Deaf* (capitalised) and *deaf* (lowercase), which was first coined in the mid-1970s. The capitalised form *Deaf* typically refers to individuals who identify with Deaf culture and view themselves as part of a cultural-linguistic minority that primarily uses sign language. In contrast, the lowercase *deaf* generally denotes individuals with hearing loss who may not identify with Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003; Pudans-Smith et al., 2019). However, this binary distinction has been the subject of much debate and critique for oversimplifying the increasingly complex identities and language practices within the deaf and hard of hearing community (Kusters et al., 2017; Pudans-Smith et al., 2019).

Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to use the broader term, *deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students* when referring to individuals with varying degrees of hearing loss, regardless of their language modality. I also apply this term when making general observations, or cited literature adopts this classification or other alternatives such as *deaf and hearing-impaired*.

The phrase *deaf students* is used when referring to individuals who use sign language. I apply this term in relation to my own research and when cited literature uses this phrasing. For readability, I may use *deaf students* and *students* interchangeably.

The term *interpreter* refers to professionals who facilitate communication between a signed and spoken language. In the Irish context, where Irish Sign Language (ISL) is the national sign language, these professionals are often referred to as ISL-English interpreters as they work between ISL and English. Those who interpret in educational settings may also be described as *educational interpreters*, and the practice itself is known as *educational interpreting*. For consistency and readability, I use the term *interpreter* throughout this thesis to encompass all of these roles.

Note on Accessibility: This thesis has been prepared with accessibility in mind. Efforts have been made to ensure the use of appropriate colour contrast, alternative text, and structured headings throughout. Additionally, a summary of the thesis will be recorded in ISL.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, Ireland's higher education (HE) landscape has undergone substantial change, driven by national policies and an increasing emphasis on diverse representation, equity, and inclusive pedagogical practices (Banks et al., 2024; Department of Education and Skills, 2011; Higher Education Authority [HEA], 2004, 2008, 2015, 2022). As higher education institutions (HEIs) strive to accommodate increasingly diverse student populations, the lived experience of deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students in Ireland, especially deaf students who use Irish Sign Language (ISL), remains underexplored.

This chapter begins by outlining the rationale for the study, with further background and context provided in Chapter 2. The research aims, objectives, and questions that guided the inquiry are subsequently presented. I then reflect on my personal motivations for undertaking this research, followed by an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Ireland has made considerable policy-driven efforts in widening participation to HE for students with disabilities (SWD), yielding measurable progress. In the past 10 years alone, there has been a 132% increase in the number of SWD registering with the Disability Support Services (DSS) in HEIs (AHEAD, 2025a). However, despite this rise, DHH students remain significantly underrepresented, as highlighted in several national policy documents and reports over the last 20 years (AHEAD, 2025a; HEA, 2008, 2015).

Students with disabilities are provided with a range of supports to facilitate their participation in HE, with ISL interpreters typically offered to deaf students. However, the provision of an interpreter introduces a unique and complex dynamic: a third-party presence within the classroom, but also within the traditional student-lecturer relationship. This shifts the interaction from a dyadic to a triadic relationship, comprising the deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer. Yet, the pedagogical and relational implications of this triadic dynamic are rarely examined in-depth from the perspective of all three stakeholders. Much of the existing literature, as discussed in Chapter 2, focuses on access supports, educational interpreting, or the experiences of individual stakeholders, often examining the student-interpreter dyad in

isolation. Likewise, little is known about how the presence of multiple deaf students in the classroom, commonly referred to as *co-enrolment*, affects teaching practices and pedagogical decision-making.

To gain a deeper understanding, it was essential to examine the relational dynamics, communication practices, and pedagogical strategies that shaped inclusion and engagement in HE. To explore these gaps, this study adopted a qualitative approach, employing reflexive thematic analysis to investigate the experiences among deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in Irish HE settings. By incorporating the perspective of all three stakeholder groups, it contributed to a more nuanced understanding of educational interpreting in HE and offered evidence-based insights to inform policy, practice, and training across the sector.

1.3 Research Objective and Questions

The primary objective of this research was to explore and understand the dynamics of effective working relationships in HE between three key stakeholders: deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers. Drawing on qualitative interviews with these stakeholders, the study aimed to identify the relational, pedagogical, and institutional factors that contribute to meaningful inclusion and equitable learning environments for deaf students. To guide this inquiry, the following research questions were developed:

1) What are the characteristics of an effective working relationship between the deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer?

This question examined how each stakeholder perceived their role within this triadic relationship and what practices or behaviours were considered conducive to effective collaboration.

2) What is the impact on teaching practice when there is a co-enrolled group of deaf students versus just one deaf student?

This question investigated whether the presence of multiple deaf students in the classroom influenced lecturers' awareness and pedagogical practices.

3) What do deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers view to be the most effective strategies and supports to ensure inclusion of deaf students in HE settings?

This question aimed to identify the strategies and supports that stakeholders considered most effective in promoting the inclusion of deaf students in HE.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers, this research sought to illuminate the lived experiences of each stakeholder group (Harris et al., 2009; Silverman, 2017). It explored how effective working relationships were formed, the impact of co-enrolment, and the strategies perceived to be most effective in fostering inclusion.

1.4 Researcher Subjectivity Statement

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my positionality and subjectivity have influenced this study. My identity, lived experiences, values, and professional background have shaped both my motivation and the lens through which I engaged with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Preissle & Villenas, 2008). Specifically, my interest in this topic is rooted in my identity as a Deaf woman with lived experience of attending HE and using interpreters in co-enrolled settings. My academic background is grounded in Deaf Studies, and in 2016, I conducted an undergraduate dissertation exploring deaf students' experience of interpreters in HE (McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019). The findings of that study sparked my interest in gaining a deeper understanding of this topic and the perspectives of other stakeholders involved.

Since 2007, I have volunteered with various organisations within the Deaf Community, spanning youth work, community development, governance, and interpreting. Notably, I served as a board director of the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) for nine years, a period that coincided with the passing of the *Irish Sign Language Act 2017*. SLIS was tasked with implementing several provisions of the Act, and as a board director, I engaged strategically with organisations in the Deaf Community, the interpreting sphere, and relevant public bodies. Throughout my tenure, I gained insight into the challenges facing the interpreting profession and the systemic barriers that affect deaf people in accessing services.

In parallel, my professional career has focused on disability inclusion and accessibility. For 12 years, I worked for an organisation whose mission was to create inclusive environments in tertiary education and employment for people with disabilities. This experience deepened my understanding of access and inclusion policies in HE for SWDs, as well as the challenges they face in transitioning into and out of HE. Currently, I work as an Access Officer for a public body, supporting both internal and external stakeholders with disabilities.

My proximity to the subject matter offers valuable insights but also introduces potential bias. Throughout the research process, I have engaged in reflexive practice to critically examine how my subjectivity and positionality influence data collection and analysis. However, I

recognise my interpretations are shaped by my values and experiences. This statement is offered in the spirit of reflexivity and transparency, recognising that all knowledge is situated and the researcher is an active participant in the construction of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

1.5 Presentation of Thesis

This thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 provided a brief rationale for the study, followed by the research aims and questions that guided the investigation. Chapter 2 situates the study within the broader landscape of HE in Ireland, with particular attention to access policies and supports for DHH students. It then explores the professionalisation of interpreters and interpreting in Irish educational contexts, outlines the scope of the literature review and describes the systemised search strategies employed, including screening and selection procedures. A thematic review of existing research is presented across three key areas: (a) navigating the HE environment, (b) relationships, and (c) educational interpreting.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology used for this study. It discusses ethical considerations, the research design, the approach to data collection, and the techniques applied to transcribing and analysis. It also acknowledges the limitations of the research design before presenting an overview of the participants' profiles and demographics. Chapter 4 presents the findings derived through reflexive thematic analysis. The findings are organised into five themes, illustrated by quotes from participants: (1) student inclusion, (2) relational dynamics, (3) classroom environment, (4) intricacies of educational interpreting, and (5) capacity building.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature, highlighting their significance within the context of this study. The discussion is structured around the same five key themes identified in the findings. Chapter 6 presents the study's conclusions, addressing the research questions and offering targeted recommendations for stakeholders at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research and final reflections on the inclusion of deaf students in HE.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature that informed the planning and framing of this research study, by critiquing existing research and identifying gaps in the current knowledge base (Cohen et al., 2018; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). To contextualise the review, I begin with an overview of HE in Ireland, with particular attention to the various inclusion policies, access supports for SWD and the representation of DHH students in HE settings. This is followed by an examination of the broader landscape of interpreting in Ireland, and its relevance to Irish educational contexts. In Section 2.4, I outline the scope of this literature review and describe the search strategies employed. Finally, I present the three thematic areas that emerged from the review: (a) navigating the HE environment, (b) relationships, and (c) educational interpreting, followed by a conclusion.

2.2 Overview of Higher Education in Ireland

The HEA oversees Ireland's publicly funded HE system, which has a diverse mix of universities, technological universities, colleges, and institutes of technology. Ireland also has several private colleges that operate independently of the HEA and do not receive core public funding. Core functions of the HEA include promoting equality of opportunity in HE, developing strategic plans and equality policies. In 2003, the HEA established the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education to oversee access for underrepresented groups, including SWD. As a result, the first *Action Plan* was published, outlining six goals, which include, *inter alia*, routes of access and progression, and teaching and learning practices.

These goals were accompanied by specific actions and numerical targets to increase participation among underrepresented groups in HE (HEA, 2004). A target of 1.8% by 2006 for SWD was set and subsequently exceeded. However, progress remained slow for certain cohorts, including DHH students, prompting the introduction of specific targets for these cohorts (HEA, 2004, 2008). Targets for DHH students remained in place through the third iteration of the *National Access Plan* (HEA, 2015), during which DHH student participation increased by 46% (HEA, 2018). The current *National Access Plan 2022 – 2028* no longer includes specific targets for DHH students, but instead focuses on broader goals such as inclusivity, flexibility, and targets for the overall SWD participation, who continue to be a priority

group (HEA, 2022). The removal of specific targets for DHH students in the latest plan may reflect the fact that earlier goals were achieved; however, it is worth questioning whether that progress directly resulted from having those targets in place, and whether their absence could hinder future momentum.

In parallel with the National Access Plans, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* was published (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). This strategy outlined several key recommendations, such as enhancing the student experience, widening access to HE, and increasing investment. One outcome of this increased investment was the establishment of the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) in 2017, a multi-stranded funding initiative (HEA, n.d.). PATH funding aims to increase participation in HE among underrepresented groups such as SWD (including intellectual disabilities), ethnic minorities, Traveller, and Roma students. Another component of PATH involves funding to build the capacity of HEIs to embed Universal Design (UD) principles, recognising that this is essential to support the success of all students (HEA, n.d.).

Over the past decade, awareness of UD, specifically Universal Design for Learning (UDL), has grown among teaching and learning staff in the tertiary education sector, which includes both higher and further education. In 2017, AHEAD and the Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN) published a position paper calling on policymakers and HEIs to embed UDL into curriculum design to better support an increasingly diverse student population (AHEAD & DAWN, 2017). In parallel, AHEAD collaborated with University College Dublin's Access and Lifelong Learning Centre to develop a Digital Badge in UDL, which was launched in 2018 (AHEAD, 2019a). This initiative was supported by the Teaching and Learning Forum of Ireland, now known as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, funded by the HEA. The online programme targeted staff in the further and HE sectors, providing them with an opportunity to learn about UDL and redesign their teaching practices accordingly. Participation in the programme has grown significantly, from 70 participants in 2018 to over 5,000 by the end of 2024 (AHEAD, 2019a, 2025b).

More recently, a cross-sectoral collaboration involving six national agencies and 21 tertiary institutions was awarded funding by the HEA to develop a National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education referred to as The ALTITUDE Charter. The aim is to support tertiary institutions in systemically embedding a UD approach across four pillars: (1) learning, teaching, and assessment; (2) supports, services and social engagement; (3) physical environment; and (4) digital environment (AHEAD, 2024a; Banks et al., 2024). These policies and developments,

along with the growing emphasis on UD and UDL, show that the Irish government, policymakers, and HEIs are not only acknowledging the importance of inclusive practices but are also taking steps to embed them systemically. While this indicates a positive shift, questions remain regarding the ongoing monitoring and successful implementation of these practices at a local level.

2.2.1 Supports for Students with Disabilities

There are a range of mechanisms and supports in place to facilitate access to HE for SWD. A major primary access route to HE is the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE); a supplementary admissions route that offers school leavers with disabilities the opportunity to access HE courses with reduced points requirements, particularly when they may not have achieved the standard entry points (Access College, 2025). However, not all HEIs participate in the DARE scheme, and each HEI makes its own decisions about how many places it wishes to reserve for DARE applicants.

Financial support is provided to publicly funded HEIs through the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). Private colleges are generally not eligible for the FSD; however, they still have a legal obligation under the *Equal Status Act 2000* to provide reasonable accommodations for SWD. For DHH students, relevant supports may include assistive technology, notetakers, academic and learning support, interpreters and captioning services known as SpeedText¹ (HEA, 2024). An analysis of FSD expenditure from 2012 to 2015 revealed that ISL interpreters and SpeedText accounted for 14% (€3.6m) of total expenditure across the three academic years, which was the third-largest share of service-related costs. During the same period, DHH students, who are likely the primary beneficiaries of these supports, represented just 2.8% of all students accessing the FSD (HEA, 2017). This data suggests that interpreters and SpeedText are of a specialised nature, likely contributing to their higher cost. Despite DHH students representing a comparatively small proportion of those accessing the FSD, the investment in these supports appears to reflect a strong commitment to accessibility.

Each HEI has an Access Office, commonly referred to as the DSS, whose staff are primarily responsible for coordinating supports for SWD and providing guidance to academic staff. A key component of this process is the needs assessment, typically conducted by a

¹ “SpeedText is an electronic class synopsis and notetaking system using two laptops, one for the deaf or hard-of-hearing person (for real-time display) and the other for the specially trained operator (for input). A SpeedText operator is trained in condensing language, thus transmitting the meaning of the points discussed, not the actual word-for-word transcription. SpeedText is not a verbatim service. It is primarily for deaf/hard-of-hearing people who have a good command of the English language. SpeedText can be provided during academic contact hours only.” (HEA, 2024, p. 12)

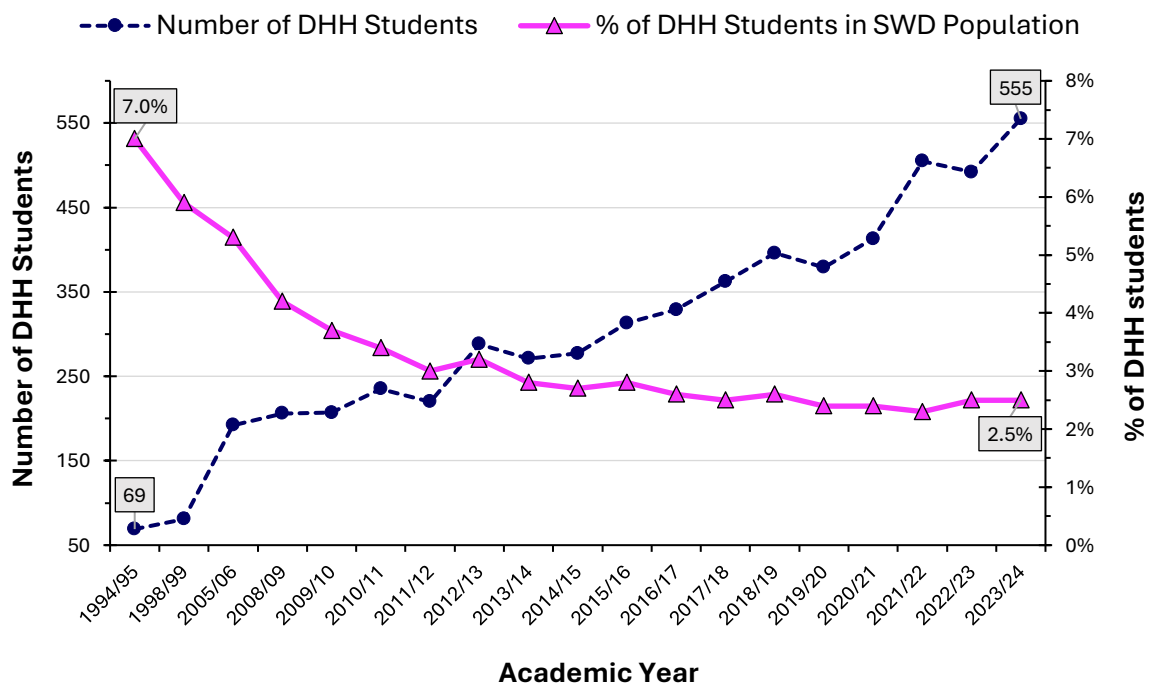
Disability Officer. This assessment identifies the appropriate and necessary supports for the student and facilitates their disclosure to relevant stakeholders in a confidential, structured manner (AHEAD & DAWN, 2018; HEA, 2024; McCarthy et al., 2018)

2.2.2 Participation Rates of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

AHEAD conducts longitudinal research on the number of SWD who register with the DSS for support. However, this data relies on the voluntary participation of HEIs, and not all have consistently submitted data over the years. As a result, figures reported by AHEAD may not fully capture the actual number of DHH students, nor do they account for those who have chosen not to register with the DSS for support. Nevertheless, the data, as presented in Figure 2.1, indicates an upward trend in the number of DHH students in HE, rising from 69 in the 1994-95 academic year to 555 DHH students in 2023/24. However, it also shows that the proportion of DHH students within the overall SWD population has decreased from 7% to 2.5%.

Figure 2.1

Trends in the Number of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Higher Education



Note. Using multiple sources, I extrapolated data to develop the above chart. (AHEAD, 2017, 2018a, 2019b, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024b, 2025a; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019).

Table 2.1

Higher Education Institutions Receiving ISL Interpreting Support

Academic Year	Number of HEIs providing ISL Support
2019/20	9
2020/21	11
2021/22	10
2022/23	10
2023/24	6

Note: This information relates to ISL support provided for those indicating DHH as a primary disability (Access Policy Team, HEA, personal communication, August 13, 2025).

Unfortunately, AHEAD’s research lacks granular data on the number of DHH students who accessed interpreting support services. I submitted a query to the HEA requesting the total number of students who received interpreting supports over the past 10 years; however, this data was not available. Following a revised query, the HEA was able to provide data on the number of HEIs that submitted requests for interpreting supports in their Resource Allocation Return form to the FSD over the last five years. This data is presented above in Table 2.1.

While this data offers some insight, it does not allow for an accurate count of individual students. Assuming at least one student per HEI, the proportion of deaf students using interpreters is significantly low when compared with the overall DHH student population as previously outlined in Figure 2.1.

2.3 Overview of Interpreters in Ireland

The professionalisation of sign language interpreters in Ireland is relatively recent. The first cohort of interpreters completed their training in 1994 (Leeson & Lynch, 2009), followed by several short-term training programmes throughout the 1990s, resulting in approximately 25 trained interpreters by 2001 (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). In 2001, the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) was established at Trinity College Dublin, marking a more sustainable approach to

interpreter education. Initially offering a two-year diploma, the programme was replaced in 2010 by a four-year degree, which continues to this day (Leeson, 2012).

CDS remains the primary entry route into the ISL interpreting profession, with alternative pathways seeing limited uptake (Leeson & Venturi, 2017). Based on available datasets across numerous literatures, approximately 173 interpreters qualified between 1992 and 2024 (CDS, 2025; Leeson, 2012; Leeson & Venturi, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2025). However, from 2019 to 2024, the average number of graduates per year was just over three (CDS, 2025), highlighting a slow pipeline of new entrants into the interpreting profession.

In 2017, SLIS, Ireland's national interpreting body, published a position paper identifying a national skills shortage of interpreters. SLIS reported that the existing capacity was insufficient to meet demand and called on the State to respond. Contributing factors included interpreters leaving the profession, low numbers entering the field, and fewer than half working full time. To meet the anticipated requirements of the proposed *Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2016*, SLIS estimated that an additional 215 interpreters would be needed (SLIS, 2017). The Bill was passed in December 2017 and is now cited as the *Irish Sign Language Act 2017*.

Two sections of the ISL Act are particularly relevant to the HE sector: the obligation for public bodies to provide free interpretation when accessing statutory services, and the requirement to engage only with verified, competent interpreters accredited under an approved scheme. Following its enactment, the Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI) was established in December 2020 to maintain the national, standards-based register of interpreters (RISLI, n.d.-a). Although approximately 173 interpreters have qualified at the time of writing this thesis, only 99 are registered with RISLI (RISLI Manager, personal communication, June 9, 2025).

This has implications for the HE sector, as it not only substantially reduces the pool of interpreters available to public bodies but also has the potential to limit HEIs' ability to meet their obligations under the ISL Act. When interpreter availability is constrained, it may inadvertently impact deaf students' engagement with HE, resulting in delays in accessing support, or sometimes, no access at all. A monitoring report on the implementation of the ISL Act identified the lack of interpreters, or difficulty accessing them, as the most common barrier faced by public bodies (National Disability Authority, 2021). This concern was echoed by interpreters themselves in a recent report, with all working interpreters reporting there were insufficient interpreters to meet the demand (McEvoy & Irish Deaf Society [IDS], 2025).

2.3.1 Interpreting in Irish Education Settings

While the ISL Act 2017 marked a significant milestone, its application within educational settings remains uneven. Notably, primary, and post-primary schools are not explicitly defined as public bodies under the Act, which may limit the enforceability of interpreter provision for accessing statutory entitlements in these contexts (National Disability Authority, 2021).

Although the *Education Act 1998* references interpreters as a support service, it does not carry the same legal weight as the ISL Act. In practice, many deaf children in pre-tertiary settings receive alternative supports such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) or additional resource teaching hours, rather than interpreters.

However, the Act mandated the development of ISL supports for deaf children coinciding with increased public advocacy for greater ISL access in pre-tertiary education (IDS, 2022; Loughlin, 2023). In response, a new scheme was launched in 2022, introducing the *ISL Specialist Classroom Support* role to provide ISL access to both the curriculum and broader school activities. Despite over 4,000 DHH children currently enrolled in primary and post-primary education, only two individuals are employed in this role. The scheme is currently under review (Hickey & Culhane, 2025).

By contrast, interpreter provision in tertiary education is well-established, supported by national policy and dedicated funding structures as previously discussed. In a recent report, 20 out of 44 interpreters reported working in third-level and adult education programmes, the fourth most common area of work (McEvoy & IDS, 2025). This indicates a relatively high demand for interpreters in tertiary education settings, particularly when considered alongside the data from the HEA previously presented in Table 2.1.

As public bodies, HEIs engage in public procurement processes when sourcing interpreters, with tenders most often awarded to private interpreting agencies. These agencies maintain a roster of freelance interpreters, many of whom are registered with RISLI and work across multiple agencies. The agency is generally responsible for coordinating interpreter schedules based on academic timetables and managing substitutions throughout the academic year. However, interpreter funding through the FSD is restricted to “academic contact hours only” (HEA, 2024, p. 12). This means that interpreting support is not available for non-academic contact hours, such as social or extracurricular activities, which are often critical to the overall student experience. In recent years, some HEIs, including Dublin City University (DCU) and Trinity College Dublin, have recruited interpreters directly as employees

(Sheridan et al., 2025). This approach allows HEIs to tailor the interpreter role to meet specific needs and potentially expand the scope of interpreting beyond the limitations of the FSD.

Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of interpreters and deaf students is outlined in the *Disability Service Educational Support Worker Pack* (AHEAD & DAWN, 2018). Interpreters are expected to prepare in advance, arrive early, interpret clearly, and maintain confidentiality. Deaf students, in turn, are expected to provide timetables to the DSS, share relevant materials, and communicate changes. Additional guidance for examinations states interpreters may facilitate communication with invigilators and examiners and translate spoken language and written questions into ISL (AHEAD & DAWN, 2018). Notably, the guidance omits any reference to the responsibilities of teaching staff. Given the central role educators play in fostering inclusive learning environments, their exclusion from this guidance risks undermining the effectiveness of support services.

The preceding sections have contextualised the evolving landscape of HE and the interpreting profession in Ireland, with particular attention to the participation of DHH students and the systemic challenges surrounding interpreting provision in education. The following section outlines the scope and methodology of the literature review conducted for this study, detailing the systemised search strategies, screening processes, and thematic framework that informed the selection and analysis of relevant literature.

2.4 Scope of the Literature Review

The literature review search was guided by the following questions:

- a) What are the experiences of deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in HE settings?
- b) How are the relationships between deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers represented in the literature?
- c) What is considered best practices for effective interpreting in HE?

2.4.1 Search Strategy

Although not a systematic literature review in its purest sense, I applied its core principles to identify relevant literature, ensuring transparency and minimising bias (Okoli, 2015). I established inclusion and exclusion criteria (Xiao & Watson, 2019) and developed search strings based on five key concepts: *sign language interpreting*, *higher education*, *relationship*, *deaf student*, and *teacher*. Table A1 (Appendix A) outlines six search strings

incorporating synonyms, alternate spellings, and Boolean operators for a comprehensive search. Given its centrality to the study, *sign language interpreting* was included in every string. Searches were conducted across eight relevant databases: Academic Search Complete, Education Source Ultimate, ERIC International, SAGE Journals Online, JSTOR, Linguistics & Language Behaviour Abstracts and RIAN (Pathways to Irish Research).

In October 2021, a pilot search using the above search strings yielded 2,966 potential articles. Preliminary analysis revealed that using '*interpret**' as a substitute for '*sign language interpret**' generated many irrelevant results related to spoken language interpretation. Consequently, '*interpret**' was excluded from subsequent search strings. The JSTOR and RIAN databases had limitations such as character restrictions and limited filtering, resulting in fewer relevant results. Additionally, SAGE Journals returned no results using the refined search strings and was excluded from further searches.

To track and monitor my searches, I created a spreadsheet (Appendix B)Appendix B documenting the search strings used for each database and the number of results generated. This included variations-based limiters such as peer-reviewed status, subject type, or keyword filters (Andrews, 2005; Okoli, 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2019). This tracking system proved useful when revisiting the literature review to identify new publications after the initial 2021 search.

2.4.2 Screening Process

After identifying relevant literature, I imported all records into Zotero, a reference management tool. Duplicate records were initially removed automatically, followed by manual removal. Additional exclusions were applied for editorials, theses, and sources with anonymous authorship. I then screened the remaining records by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Xiao & Watson, 2019), starting with titles and abstracts. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2000 onwards that addressed educational interpreting and relationships. Exclusion criteria included non-English articles, books, reports, conference papers, articles published before 2000, and those unrelated to the study focus, such as healthcare and legal contexts. Following this, I retrieved the remaining records for full-text review, although some were unavailable. The remaining full-text papers were then assessed for eligibility, as outlined in Section 2.4.4.

2.4.3 Supplementary Search Strategies

Much of the literature retrieved through my initial systemised search focused on interpreter-mediated learning, comprehension, and inclusion of deaf students in the classroom. While some publications addressed the student-interpreter relationship, there was a noticeable lack of literature regarding the relationship between deaf students and lecturers. To explore this, I developed a new search string centred on three key concepts: *relationship*, *deaf student*, and *lecturer*, deliberately excluding *interpreter* to focus results. Applying similar inclusion and exclusion criteria from my initial systemised search, this search still yielded limited results. Therefore, I conducted a third systematised search targeting articles published post-2010, with a broader focus on student-lecturer relationships. Tables A2 and A3 in Appendix A present both sets of additional search strings.

In addition to database searches, I conducted freehand searches to identify relevant literature not captured through structured search strategies. This helped to identify some key sources and frequently cited works. Finally, the original exclusion criteria in my initial systematised search led to the omission of several influential sources published before 2000. Given their continued relevance, I reviewed these for eligibility and incorporated them into the literature review where appropriate.

2.4.4 Selection Process and Developing Themes

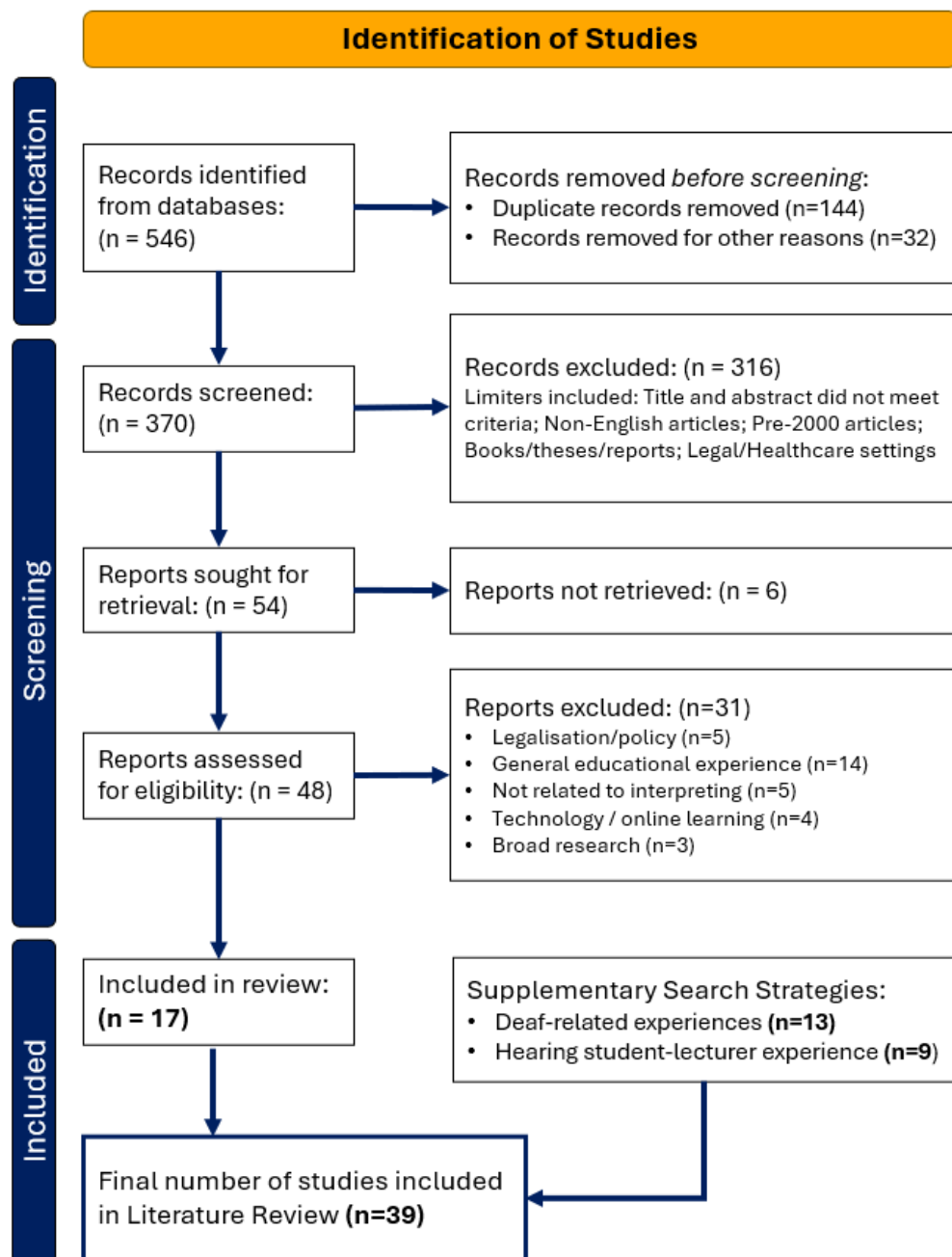
To assess each publication for inclusion in the literature review, I used a critical reading form (Appendix C) to record key details such as main findings, limitations, and relevance to my research. Using a scoring matrix, I assigned relevance scores from 1 (*very useful*) to 4 (*not relevant*), first through a *working relationship* lens, then through an *interpreting in HE* lens. Publications were organised under three main topics aligned with the guiding questions: *educational interpreting, relationships, and experiences*, and *best practices and inclusion*. Sub-topics were also recorded and included stakeholder experiences, inter-relationships, access accommodations, linguistic considerations, comprehension, and inclusive practices. An extract of this selection process is presented in Appendix D.

To proceed to the next stage of the literature review, I selected publications with a relevance score of 1 or 2, along with additional sources identified through supplementary search strategies. An adapted PRIMSA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021), presented in Figure 2.2, illustrates the systematised approach used for identifying, screening, and including literature. In total, 39 sources were included in the literature review.

The following literature review is organised thematically into three main areas: (a) navigating the HE classroom, (b) relationships and experiences, and (c) educational interpreting.

Figure 2.2

Studies Included in Literature Review



2.5 Navigating the Higher Education Environment

2.5.1 Accommodations and Readiness

Research suggests that many DHH students enter HE without a clear understanding of the various accommodations and supports that may be available to them. In New Zealand, Powell's (2011) mixed methods study, examining the learning and social participation experiences of 64 DHH students in tertiary education, revealed challenges regarding the academic readiness of students and their transition to tertiary education. Some students were unaware of, or did not fully understand, the accommodations potentially available to them and therefore did not avail of such supports, which negatively impacted their transition into tertiary education. Powell called for the need to develop a transition programme tailored specifically to DHH students, aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate tertiary education successfully (Hyde et al., 2016; Powell, 2011).

In The Netherlands, Van Den Heuij et al. (2022) conducted qualitative research with 32 DHH students to explore their academic and social experiences in mainstream HE. Accommodations emerged as a prominent sub-theme under environmental factors in the data analysis. While most students accessed some form of accommodations, others did not, either because they perceived them as unnecessary, wished to avoid stigma, or were unaware of the available supports. Notably, some students reported that access support staff lacked sufficient expertise in recommending appropriate accommodations and instead deferred to students themselves to identify suitable accommodations, a practice which some found frustrating (Van Den Heuij et al., 2022).

Frumos and Roşu (2019) conducted a comparative questionnaire-based study involving 29 Romanian and 34 European DHH students to examine differences in their HE experiences. This study investigated their understanding of their teachers and hearing peers, variations in accommodations provided, and suggestions for improving access to HE. A key finding showed that Romanian students receive fewer accommodations overall when compared to European students. Although Romanian students underscored the need for more accommodations, European students focused more on teaching strategies and the importance of incorporating the student voice (Frumos & Roşu, 2019). This contrast suggests differing levels of institutional support across national contexts. In Greece, for example, there was a lack of formalised structures in place to fund appropriate accommodations for DHH students (Hyde et al., 2016). Support was often provided by unpaid student interpreters and by student peers who assisted

with notetaking or tutoring. Consequently, students were reliant on the “significant goodwill” of others (Hyde et al., 2016, p. 450), resulting in inconsistent support across HEIs.

These findings also raise broader questions about institutional readiness to support DHH students effectively. Although involving students in decision-making around accommodations may appear empowering, it can also expose potential gaps in institutional knowledge and preparedness (Cawthon et al., 2014). This issue mirrors concerns about the academic readiness of DHH students, particularly if they have not previously been exposed to these supports. For example, in Ireland, deaf students are likely to encounter educational interpreters for the first time in HE settings, due to the systemic barriers that limit access to educational interpreters in pre-tertiary settings. As a result, they may be ill-equipped to identify which accommodations best meet their needs.

This is reflected in the Irish study by McGrotty and Sheridan (2019), which involved 27 deaf students, many of whom reported uncertainty about their own responsibilities and how to address issues with the DSS regarding their accommodations. As a result, most did not provide feedback about their accommodations with the DSS. However, two students who did share feedback reported that their identities were disclosed to the interpreter by the DSS, which led to feelings of awkwardness. This reflects both limited academic preparedness among students and a lack of institutional readiness, potentially discouraging future engagement with the DSS.

2.5.2 Self-Advocacy

Themes of self-advocacy, self-reliance, and persistence among DHH students in tertiary education are evident in the literature. These themes encompass students asserting their rights to accommodations, negotiating their supports and classroom arrangements and engaging in conversations with key stakeholders responsible for facilitating inclusion (Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Hyde et al., 2016; Listman & Dingus-Eason, 2018; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Nikolarazi et al., 2019; Powell, 2011; Powell et al., 2014; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022).

Powell (2011) identified self-advocacy as critical for securing appropriate accommodations. Similarly, Lang (2002) recommended self-advocacy as a key strategy for improving academic success and retention, recognising the importance of students having the skills and tools to communicate their needs effectively. However, some students in Powell’s (2011) study admitted they lacked the confidence and knowledge to advocate for themselves and instead relied on parental support. This reliance may stem from parents having assumed the advocacy role throughout their children’s earlier educational experiences, therefore limiting

opportunities for DHH students to develop these skills independently (Nikolarazi et al., 2019). Students also emphasised disclosing their hearing loss to foster understanding and enhance their participation in HE (Hyde et al., 2016; Powell, 2011).

This was echoed in the Van Den Heuij et al. (2022) study, who found that many students were open about their hearing loss with peers, lecturers, and professionals, actively communicating their needs. For example, one student proactively disclosed to a lecturer, requesting they face them while speaking. Overall, students in this study described themselves as persistent, self-assertive, and proactive (Van Den Heuij et al., 2022). However, it is important to consider cultural and national contexts when examining self-advocacy among DHH students. Frumos and Roşu (2019) argued that Romanian students were still developing basic self-advocacy skills, in contrast to their European counterparts, who were further ahead in asserting their rights and requesting supports.

Aside from navigating institutional systems and advocating for supports, DHH students often continued to negotiate and engage in self-advocacy within the classroom, even after accommodations had been granted. This included decisions about positioning to maintain a clear line of sight to both the interpreter and lecturer, managing the simultaneous demands of notetaking, interacting with hearing peers and participating in group activities (Al Hashimi et al., 2021; Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Kermit & Holiman, 2018; Lang, 2002; Nikolarazi & Kofidou, 2021, 2024; Powell, 2011; Powell et al., 2014; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022; Winston, 1994). Additionally, DHH students expressed discomfort when the use of accommodations drew unwanted attention to them in classroom settings (McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Powell et al., 2014; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022). This visibility led to feelings of isolation, particularly when they were the only DHH student in their course and could be compounded by the experience of being “outed” as a person with a disability (Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013).

2.5.3 Isolation and Social Connections

Feelings of isolation among DHH students extend beyond the classroom, often stemming from interactions with peers and staff, and limited involvement in social and extracurricular activities, all of which are key components of a positive student experience. In Australia, a survey of 72 DHH students found that many described the social aspects of HE as difficult and challenging (Hyde et al., 2016). These “feelings of social isolation were intertwined with academic life”, with group work cited as a specific example (Hyde et al., 2016, p. 446). Group work was also identified as a challenge in studies by Van Den Heuij et al. (2022) and

Frumos and Roşu (2019). Although DHH students in the Van Den Heuji et al. (2022) study generally reported positive attitudes and willingness from peers and lecturers, difficulties remained. Fatigue was frequently mentioned as a barrier which limited participation in social events, contributing to loneliness.

Building on Powell's (2011) earlier work, Powell et al. (2014) reported that 75% of DHH students felt their hearing loss affected their ability to participate in social functions from *a fair amount to a great deal*. Similarly, 58% and 69% reported that casual interactions with other students and with lecturers, respectively, were impacted to the same extent. Reduced access to incidental learning, difficulty in peer social interactions and accessing extracurricular activities contributed to feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Powell et al., 2014). For some, academic achievement took precedence, with one student noting that it "*demanding so much effort that little energy was left for social activities and interactions*" (Kermit & Holiman, 2018, p.165).

2.6 Relationships and Experiences

2.6.1 The Lecturer – Student Relationship

In the broader literature on lecturer-student relationships in HE, students frequently emphasised rapport and respect. These qualities include lecturers' approachability, time for questions, actively listening to student concerns, appropriate tone of voice and eye-contact, being non-judgemental, and showing genuine interest in students' backgrounds (Cladera, 2021; Deering & Williams, 2019; Pietersen, 2014; Titus & Roman, 2019). Research also shows that positive rapport enhances learning, motivation and increase classroom engagement (Deering & Williams, 2019; Titus & Roman, 2019; Uleanya, 2020; Xerri et al., 2018). For example, Xerri et al. (2018), in a survey of 210 students, found that poor lecturer-student relationships negatively affected students' perceptions and reduced academic engagement.

Similar themes emerge in the literature from the lecturer's perspective. Lecturers often define the quality of their relationships with students through meaningful interactions and rapport. Many acknowledge that these relationships not only influence student learning but also serve as a source of inspiration and motivation in their own teaching practice (Dransfield et al., 2022; Uleanya, 2020; Williams et al., 2016). However, several barriers, such as limited contact time, institutional policies, and individual beliefs, can hinder the development of these relationships (Uleanya, 2020; Williams et al., 2016; Wong & Chiu, 2020).

While rapport is widely valued, it often relies on communication cues such as eye-contact and tone of voice, which may not be accessible to all students. This is particularly relevant in the context of DHH students, whose communication may be through interpreters. These dynamics raises important questions about how the deaf student-lecturer relationship is perceived, and whether traditional markers of rapport are inclusive.

2.6.2 The Deaf Student – Lecturer Relationship

In exploring the deaf student-lecturer relationship in HE, I was unable to locate any studies that focused exclusively on this dynamic using the search strategies I employed. However, several empirical studies referenced DHH students' experiences of lecturers and teaching staff in HE, which provided insights. Kermit and Holiman (2018) examined the experiences of five deaf Master's students in Norway who attended both general courses and participated in a co-enrolled deaf group. Students emphasised that lecturers played a crucial role in either facilitating or hindering inclusion, with deaf awareness, teaching skills, and attitudes being central. Lecturers were seen not only as individuals, but as institutional representatives, with formal responsibility for inclusive practices. Notably, when students were part of a co-enrolled group, they felt more often recognised as a cultural-linguistic group rather than a group of disabled students.

The authors identified three levels of lecturer competence in working with deaf students: *no or little deaf competence*, *some deaf competence*, and *high deaf competence* (Kermit & Holiman, 2018, p. 161). Lecturers with *little or no competence* had never taught deaf students and were working with sign language interpreters for the first time. Among these lecturers, three distinct attitudes were observed: (a) *stereotyping*, where students felt inferior and accommodations were viewed as burdensome; (b) *indifferent*, where deafness was approached through a medical model and support was seen as the student's responsibility; and (c) *open and inquisitive*, where lecturers, despite inexperience, showed a willingness to learn. The first two negatively impacted student motivation, while the third had a positive influence on motivation and participation.

Lecturers with *some deaf competence* made practical adjustments to their teaching, such as pausing between topics, preparing interpreters, and modifying seating arrangements, but students still reported feeling secondary to their hearing peers. In contrast, lecturers with *high deaf competence*, who taught in sign language, used inclusive strategies like visual aids and identifying students before they spoke. Students felt that these lecturers placed them on

an equal footing with hearing peers, removing barriers to learning and enhancing their motivation and participation (Kermit & Holiman, 2018). While this study offers valuable insights, their emphasis on high deaf competence, defined primarily by fluency in sign language, raises concerns about broader applicability. In Ireland, as in many mainstream settings, sign language fluency among lecturers is rare, making this level of competence difficult to achieve.

Lecturer attitudes and awareness were also highlighted in studies by Frumos and Roşu (2019) and Van Den Heuij et al. (2022). In The Netherlands, students reported that lecturers' attitudes significantly shaped their university experience (Van Den Heuij et al., 2022). Frumos and Roşu's (2019) comparative study found that European students encountered inaccessible materials, limited awareness, and unresponsiveness to accommodation needs, leaving them feeling unequal to hearing peers. Romanian students, by comparison, reported that lecturers often taught without any visual materials, and due to attitudinal and relational barriers, many felt uncomfortable asking questions when they did not understand the content. Across both groups, students emphasised the need for more inclusive teaching strategies, advocating for an "open attitude" and to "show more interest" in Deaf culture (Frumos & Roşu, 2019, p. 209).

Al Hashimi et al. (2021) explored the experiences of 11 co-enrolled DHH students in a university in Bahrain, all sign language users who had transitioned from special schools into mainstream HE. All, except one, preferred segregated settings citing fast-paced teaching, interpreter lag time, and communication barriers with lecturers and hearing peers. Two students noted that segregated environments allowed for more time to repeat themselves, ask questions and engage in discussions (Al Hashimi et al., 2021). While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to note that all students were still in their orientation year, which may have influenced their preference due to the initial adjustment challenges.

No studies were found at the time of writing that specifically examined lecturers' perspective on their relationships with deaf students. However, Nikolarizi and Kofidou's (2024) study offers relevant insights into the teaching practices and accommodation strategies used by 51 lecturers in Greece to support DHH students. Although not focused exclusively on deaf students, the study sheds light on practices that may influence the deaf student-lecturer relationship. Accommodations included UDL principles, such as making presentations available to all students via virtual learning platforms, using images and text, and structuring presentations for accessibility. Lecturers also described efforts to maintain eye-contact (although they noted this was challenging due to the need to move around the room), monitoring speaking pace, repeating comments, and adjusting classroom layouts. Additionally,

strategies for checking comprehension included asking direct questions and observing visual cues. However, some lecturers relied on interpreters to confirm student understanding (Nikolarazi & Kofidou, 2024). This suggests a limited understanding of the interpreter's role and positions the interpreter as a substitute for direct student interaction, reflecting a lack of meaningful engagement with the DHH student. These findings underscore the importance of lecturer awareness and inclusive practices, while also revealing gaps in meaningful interaction with DHH students.

2.6.3 The Deaf Student – Interpreter Relationship

This section draws on literature exploring deaf student-interpreter relationships in both tertiary and pre-tertiary education, due to the limited availability of research focused specifically on HE settings. Deaf students reported that having regular interpreters throughout their course enabled interpreters to become familiar subject-specific terminology, easily identify and refer to individuals in the classroom, and recall previous content (McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019). Familiarity also supported the co-construction of vocabulary relevant to the field of study, enhancing both the accuracy and pace of interpreting (Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019). Similarly, elementary school teachers valued consistent interpreters for continuity purposes (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001). However, concerns were raised that relying on regular interpreters may limit students' exposure to different interpreting styles and potentially foster dependency on a specific interpreter, particularly in pre-tertiary settings (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001; Yarger, 2001). In the Irish context, where there is a shortage of interpreters (SLIS, 2017), reliance on specific interpreters may reduce students' adaptability and pose challenges if they are unavailable.

Two studies by Prinzi (2022, 2024) offer further insights into the deaf student-interpreter relationships in K-12 (pre-tertiary) settings. These studies, involving 18 deaf adults and 23 interpreters reflecting on experiences, explored feedback practices, interpreter roles, and student autonomy in mainstream classrooms. Collectively, these studies emphasise that the deaf student-interpreter relationship is foundational to deaf students' access and autonomy. Interpreters viewed themselves not only communication facilitators but also as guides, supporting students in using interpreting services and acting as a resource for teachers. In the 2022 study, interpreters stressed the importance building trust and engaging students in collaborative discussions. However, students reported discomfort giving direct feedback,

fearing it might damage the relationship, and instead preferred to go to a third-party. In contrast, interpreters felt by doing that, it could undermine the relationship (Prinzi, 2022).

The 2024 study identified key traits of effective interpreters, including flexibility, skill set, responsiveness, and strong interpersonal skills. Interpreters viewed their role as supporting deaf students' autonomy and fostering independence over time. However, some students felt interpreters sometimes acted more like educators or authority figures, which risked weakening the relationship. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that when collaboration occurred, it strengthened the relationship and supported their autonomy (Prinzi, 2024). The perception of interpreters as authority figures may be shaped by power dynamics in pre-tertiary settings, where the young age profile of students often necessitates more support. As such, this dynamic may be less relevant in HE settings, where greater independence is expected of students. However, these findings still offer relevant insights into how both students and interpreters perceive their relationship, particularly for deaf students encountering educational interpreters for the first time.

2.7 Educational Interpreting

2.7.1 Interpreter-Mediated Learning and Comprehension

In response to concerns around mainstreaming and the closure of special schools in the United States, Winston (1994) describes deaf students who access education through interpreters as an “interpreted education, an education that is processed through the channel of the interpreter before arriving at the student” (p. 56). Winston argues that this process renders the information derivative, potentially impacting comprehension due to the cognitive demands placed on deaf students. These demands stem from the need to constantly refocus attention amid competing visual inputs, often resulting in fatigue. While Winston acknowledges that traditional lecture-style teaching may be more accessible, challenges remain, particularly during demonstrations that require students to visually follow the activity. Winston highlights also the difficulty of notetaking, stating that notetaking itself is a valuable learning activity that reinforces comprehension. Similarly, Stinson and Lang (1994) point out that deaf students' limited exposure and reduced proficiency in the English language may hinder understanding of unfamiliar terms when interpreted.

Marschark et al. (2008) describe interpreted education as a form of *mediated learning*, contrasting it with *direct learning*, which occurs when students receive content directly from

the lecturer due to a shared language. To investigate the potential advantages of direct learning over mediated learning, they conducted a series of studies involving both hearing and deaf students, comprising both signing and oral students. The studies assessed comprehension across different types of university lectures delivered through mediated and direct instruction. Learning outcomes were measured using pre-test and post-test questionnaires. A range of instructional methods were used, including interpreters with differing skill levels, simultaneous communication², and instruction by both deaf and hearing lecturers. Key findings indicated that hearing students receiving mediated instruction were not significantly disadvantaged compared to deaf students receiving direct instruction.

In one experiment, both hearing, and deaf students watched lectures delivered through both formats. Analysis of test scores revealed that deaf students consistently scored lower than their hearing peers across all conditions. However, deaf students performed better under direct instruction than mediated instruction. Interestingly, hearing students achieved identical scores in both formats, suggesting that mediated instruction did not hinder their comprehension, challenging the assumption that direct instruction is inherently superior. If that were the case, hearing students would have performed worse under mediated instruction. The study also found no significant difference in outcomes between direct instruction via American Sign Language (ASL) for signing students and simultaneous communication for oral students. However, oral students generally performed lower than signing students and hearing students.

These findings align with earlier research by Marschark et al. (2004, 2005), which highlights a persistent gap in comprehension between deaf students and their hearing peers. Across these studies, hearing students consistently outperformed deaf students in comprehension tasks. In one experiment, the average comprehension score for deaf students was 59%, compared to 87% for hearing students, a gap of nearly 30% (Marschark et al., 2004). This disparity remained even when researchers controlled for prior content knowledge. However, other studies by Marschark et al., (2005, 2008) found that, under controlled conditions, deaf students can proportionally learn and gain knowledge at similar rates to their hearing peers. Nonetheless, the cumulative evidence from these studies suggest that deaf students generally enter and leave the classroom with less content knowledge than their hearing peers (2004, 2005, 2008). While this may reflect challenges in access and comprehension, the controlled conditions used in these experiments may not reflect the

² Simultaneous Communication is spoken language and sign language being used together at the same time.

realities of HE settings where there are competing demands such as classroom discourse, and varying experience level of interpreters and lecturer awareness.

2.7.2 Interpreting Styles and Preferences

In HE settings, interpreters may choose to adopt a *free-interpretation* style or a *transliteration* style (Napier, 2005). Free-interpretation generally involves conveying spoken language to sign language in a way the interpreter deems appropriate and comprehensible for the deaf student. In contrast, transliteration, sometimes referred to as literal interpretation, closely mirrors the structure of spoken language. It is typically characterised by fingerspelling vocabulary, mouthing spoken words while signing, and minimal elaboration (Napier & Barker, 2004).

Napier and Barker (2004) investigated interpreting style preferences among four deaf university students in Australia. After viewing videotaped lecturers using both styles, the students expressed a preference for a combination of both. They emphasised the importance of fingerspelling key academic terms, which helped them access and become familiar with subject-specific vocabulary. However, they noted that free-interpretation could be challenging for notetaking, as it requires them to reinterpret the information back into written English. This finding is echoed by Blankmeyer Burke and Nicodemus (2013) where the first author, a deaf philosophy student, preferred transliteration due to the nature of the discipline's emphasis on word order for accurate representation.

Despite these preferences for interpreting styles, research suggests that interpreting styles do not significantly affect comprehension. Marschark et al. (2004) conducted three experiments involving 38 deaf university students and found no substantial differences in comprehension between those who viewed free-interpretation and those who viewed transliteration. Both styles were understood equally well. A follow-up study by Marschark et al. (2005) introduced the variable of student-interpreter familiarity. One hundred deaf university students were grouped by interpreting style preference and viewed two video-taped lectures, with a break in between to allow interaction with the interpreters to gain familiarity. Again, results showed that neither interpreting style nor familiarity had a reliable effect on post-test scores. However, Marschark et al. (2005) noted that familiarity may yield positive effects over time suggesting that its impact may not be immediately measurable through short-term testing.

This longer-term view aligns with findings by Blankmeyer Burke and Nicodemus (2013), and McGrotty and Sheridan (2019), who argue that student-interpreter familiarity supports the

co-construction of subject-specific vocabulary. This collaborative process enhances the accuracy and pace of interpreting, factors which may influence comprehension over time. Together, these studies suggest that interpreting style and familiarity play a more nuanced role in educational interpreting than short-term assessments can capture, particularly as such assessments often fail to account for individual learning needs. While comprehension may not always be reflected in test scores, these elements can significantly shape students' engagement, retention, and confidence in the classroom.

2.7.3 Fidelity of Interpreted Content

Simultaneous interpretation, where interpreters translate spoken language in real time, places a high cognitive demand on the interpreter. When faced with time lags, they must quickly decide what content to convey, resulting in information loss (Stinson & Lang, 1994; Winston, 1994). Napier (2005), building on her earlier research, referred to this loss as *omissions* in a study involving 10 Auslan³ interpreters who interpreted a segment of a university lecture. The study found that interpreters omitted information, both consciously and unconsciously, as a potential linguistic strategy, influenced by their familiarity with academia and the subject matter. While Napier's study focused on omissions in HE, similar concerns arise in elementary settings where interpreters often play a more central role. In many classrooms, interpreters may be the only individuals able to communicate directly with deaf students. Consequently, the nature of deaf student-interpreter interactions can have an influence on how much of the classroom discourse is conveyed.

Building on this idea, Wolbers et al. (2012) examined how elementary classroom discourse was interpreted either in parallel or divergently. They defined *parallel interpretation* as maintaining the original meaning, and *divergent interpretation* as any additional discourse that altered the original content and intent, through added or omitted information. Their analysis of video recordings revealed an average of 33.2% parallel interpretation and 66.8% divergent interpretation. Notably, 88.5% of the divergent interpretations involved spoken discourse by the teacher that was not interpreted into sign language for the deaf student. The remaining portion consisted of signed discourse by the deaf student that was not interpreted into speech for the teacher. The researchers identified five main causes for divergent interpretation: instructional decisions, social discourse adjustments, environmental or

³ Auslan is the name used for Australian Sign Language.

situational factors, role changes, and managerial decisions. Among these, instructional decisions were the most prevalent. These included instances where the interpreter chose to reduce the message due to the deaf student looking away, lag time, providing further explanation or clarifying terminology (Wolbers et al., 2012).

The finding that only 33.2% of interpretations were parallel is striking; however, the study involved just one interpreter and one deaf elementary student who also had additional needs. This narrow scope limits the generalisability of the findings and applicability to HE settings. Despite this limitation, the study does illuminate the complex decision-making processes that educational interpreters must navigate. In elementary settings, interpreters assume additional roles such as clarifying teacher instructions, facilitating peer interactions, and even informing teachers about the student's progress (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001; Prinzi, 2022, 2024). Yet the high rate of divergent interpretation reported in the Wolbers et al. (2012) study raises concerns about the fidelity of classroom discourse. Such gaps in discourse may potentially impact deaf students' educational experience and learning outcomes.

This issue was also highlighted in a study by Pirone et al. (2018), which involved five deaf undergraduate students in mainstream university settings who used ASL. Participants expressed frustration when interpreters filtered or simplified information, whether from lecturers, other students, or the deaf students themselves. They reported being less likely to contribute to group discussions if they felt their contributions were not accurately interpreted. Some students also noted adjusting their ASL register to accommodate the interpreter's limited fluency which led to feelings of disempowerment and distrust towards the interpreter (Pirone et al., 2018). These findings echo those of McGrotty and Sheridan (2019), who found that deaf students viewed trust as a key attribute in interpreting their classroom contributions. Taken together, these insights raise important questions about the competencies required of interpreters to navigate such demands effectively.

2.7.4 Interpreter Competency

Deaf students have expressed concerns about interpreter competency in several empirical studies (Al Hashimi et al., 2021; Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Hyde et al., 2016; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Napier & Barker, 2004; Powell et al., 2014). Common issues raised include interpreters lacking appropriate experience or qualifications, the need for a baseline university education when working in HE settings, and at a minimum, familiarity with the subject matter. However, some DHH students, while acknowledging ongoing challenges with interpreter quality

and availability, still reported satisfaction with the support they received (Guarinello et al., 2008; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Powell et al., 2014). For instance, in Ireland, deaf students described feeling “fortunate” to have access to education with interpreting support (McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019, p. 78). In contrast, DHH students in Bahrain viewed the interpreter as the determining factor in their ability to progress through HE (Al Hashimi et al., 2021).

Beyond concerns regarding qualifications and competency, both students, and interpreters have highlighted difficulties with subject-specific vocabulary, particularly in HE contexts. In Brazil, interpreters reported challenges due to unfamiliarity with academic content and the lack of subject-specific vocabulary in LIBRAS⁴ (Guarinello et al., 2008). In Greece, interpreters working in HE were unpaid student trainee interpreters, who lacked general sign vocabulary knowledge, let alone subject-specific vocabulary (Hyde et al., 2016). Similarly, European and Romanian DHH students noted interpreters’ limited subject-specific vocabulary (Frumos & Roşu, 2019). In the United States, deaf students expressed frustration with interpreters’ limited vocabulary, incorrect conceptual meanings, inappropriate sign choices, reliance on English syntax, and insufficient use of spatial morphology to represent verbs and placement (Pirone et al., 2018).

These concerns are further supported by research into interpreter performance and training gaps. Schick et al.’s (1999) longitudinal study, using data from the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment, found that only 44% of interpreters met the minimum skill level required. While many performed well in sign vocabulary, they scored lower in grammar and overall message quality. The authors highlight the lack of formal training and qualifications among educational interpreters, noting that many working in elementary settings may not be adequately qualified. Similarly, a survey of educational interpreters working in rural states in America found that many desired more opportunities for professional development and feedback but often worked in isolation with limited access to interpreting colleagues (Yarger, 2001).

2.8 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter reviewed the literature on the multifaceted experiences of DHH students in HE, the provision of interpreting services, and the relational dynamics among key stakeholders. The review revealed valuable insights into areas such as interpreter-mediated

⁴ LIBRAS is the name used for Brazilian Sign Language

learning, interpreting styles, fidelity of interpreted content and interpreter competency. However, it also highlighted notable gaps, particularly the limited literature which focused on the relationships between deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in HE.

Due to this scarcity, it was necessary to draw on some literature from pre-tertiary educational settings to inform the discussion. While these sources offered useful parallels, they also underscored the need for further research situated within the specific context of HE. These findings reinforce the importance of exploring stakeholder relationships in greater depth, particularly in Irish settings where educational interpreting is still evolving.

Chapter 3 opens with the research questions that guided this study, followed by an outline of the methodological framework. It details the research design, data collection procedures, analytical strategies employed and introduces the participants involved in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to explore the lived experiences of deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in Irish HE settings. Given the limited research on triadic relationships and the nuanced dynamics of educational interpreting, a qualitative approach was adopted to capture rich, contextual insights from each stakeholder group.

Firstly, the ethical considerations underpinning the study are discussed, followed by a detailed account of the approach to data collection, including sampling strategies and recruitment procedures. The next section outlines the data analysis process, encompassing transcription, translating, and coding. An overview of participant profiles and demographic information is then presented, followed by a reflection on the study's methodological limitations.

Ethical approval for this study was granted in January 2023 (Appendix E) by DCU's Research Ethics Committee (REC), following an expedited review process. The study aimed to address three core research questions, each developed in response to gaps identified in the literature review:

1. What are the characteristics of an effective working relationship between the deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer?
2. What is the impact on teaching practice when there is a co-enrolled group of deaf students versus just one deaf student?
3. What do deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers view to be the most effective strategies and supports to ensure inclusion of deaf students in HE settings

3.2 Ethical Considerations

3.2.1 Insider-Researcher

A key ethical consideration was acknowledging my position as an insider-researcher. I identify as a bilingual bimodal Deaf woman (Allen, 2015; Grosjean, 1992) and I am an active member of the Deaf Community. *Bimodal bilingualism* refers to the use of two languages in

different modalities, in my case, ISL and English (both written and spoken). I regularly switch between these languages depending on the context, which reflects the fluid nature of communication in my everyday life. As outlined in Section 1.4, my researcher subjectivity statement, I brought extensive personal experience and deep understanding of both the Deaf Community and the interpreting sphere to this research. My linguistic and cultural background, having Deaf parents and attending both mainstream and deaf schools, shaped my lived experience and provided me with a unique lens through which I engaged with participants and the data.

This insider status enriched the study by fostering empathetic engagement and establishing trust with research participants (Harris et al., 2009). It also enabled me to be particularly attuned to non-verbal communication, which is central to Deaf culture. In ISL, non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, eye gaze, and body language carry grammatical and emotional meaning (O’Baill & Matthews, 2000). This sensitivity, combined with the ability to engage directly in participants’ preferred language, may have facilitated deeper exploration and interpretation of the data collected (Taylor, 2011).

However, being an insider also presented a distinct set of ethical challenges. Floyd and Arthur (2012) describe *internal ethical engagement*, the dilemmas that arise from pre-existing or ongoing personal and professional relationships, insider-knowledge, and concerns around anonymity. These relationships can complicate interviews, particularly when participants seek affirmation or agreement from the researcher (Harris et al., 2009). I was aware that my familiarity with many participants, an inevitable outcome given the niche focus of the research and the sampling methods employed, could introduce bias or blur boundaries. For instance, participants may have been aware of my personal views on this topic due to my professional work experience and involvement with SLIS.

To mitigate these risks, I clearly outlined my role within the study and reassured participants that their perspectives were being sought without judgement or influence. I remained reflexive throughout, carefully considering when and how to draw upon my insider-knowledge. While this allowed me to probe more deeply and potentially enrich the data, I was mindful of the risk that it could “undermine the respondent’s psychological defences as well as create a degree of awkwardness” (Floyd & Arthur, 2012, p. 176). Balancing empathy with objectivity was a continuous and deliberate effort throughout this study.

3.2.2 Researcher Positionality

In addition to my insider status, a second ethical consideration was to reflect on my positionality and remain mindful of the various power and role dynamics that could arise between myself and each group of research participants.

With *Group 1 – Deaf Students*, I shared a common language, identity, and similar educational experiences of using ISL interpreting support within HE settings. However, as a bimodal bilingual individual, I recognise the potential for *hearing privilege*, described as having “unearned advantages and benefits” based on hearing ability (O’Connell, 2021, p. 23). My ability to access information through both spoken English and ISL may have been perceived as a benefit that shaped my HE journey differently from theirs. This could have led to a sense that our experiences were not fully aligned, or that I might not empathise with their challenges. To address this, I conducted interviews in each participant’s preferred language and modality and clarified that the study aimed to explore a range of lived experiences.

For *Group 2 – Interpreters*, many participants shared a similar educational background, having attended the CDS where the majority, if not all, interpreters acquired their qualification. Several were familiar with me through my previous leadership roles within the Deaf Community. Given my role as a service user and my friendships with other service users, interpreters may have approached their responses during interviews with a degree of caution. They may have been mindful of interpreter-client confidentiality and concerned that I could potentially recognise participants or examples they shared. To mitigate these concerns, I reassured participants that the focus of the study was on general experiences rather than specific individuals or HEIs. I also clarified my role as a researcher and outlined privacy considerations in the Plain Language Statement (PLS) available in Appendix F.

With *Group 3 – Lecturers*, I had pre-existing relationships with some participants, having previously been their student. This may have influenced how they perceived me, potentially viewing me from a lecturer-student lens rather than as an academic researcher. Even among those unfamiliar with me, my Deaf identity may have shaped their responses, possibly leading to guardedness or concern about being judged. To address this, I made efforts to put participants at ease, encouraging open dialogue and reassuring them that terminology was not a concern, in order to foster honest and reflective discussion.

3.2.3 Confidentiality

A third major ethical consideration was confidentiality, particularly when researching minority groups such as the Deaf Community. The probability of knowing someone within the Deaf Community is high, and it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity. Pre-existing social relationships between the researcher and participants, the potential to recognise individuals mentioned during interviews, or the possibility that others within the Deaf Community may identify participants upon publication all contribute to this challenge (Harris et al., 2009; Singleton et al., 2014). These concerns are especially pronounced in the Irish context, given the small population of deaf people who use ISL and interpreters, as well as the niche focus of this study.

To address this, all participants were informed, both through the PLS and again prior to the interview, that every effort would be made to protect their identity. However, it was also explained that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. During transcription, any identifying information that arose in interviews was either removed or substituted with a generic term or category. This included removing personal names, replacing references to specific HEIs with general terms such as *university* or *college*, and using gender-neutral pronouns where appropriate. Specific educational courses mentioned during interviews or collected via demographic questionnaires were generalised.

To further safeguard anonymity, participants' names were replaced with randomly selected pseudonyms. These pseudonyms do not reflect or imply the participants' actual gender, nor should they be interpreted as the opposite gender. This additional step was taken to reduce the risk of identification, particularly given the small size of the community involved.

3.3 Approach to Data Collection

During the design phase, I considered quantitative, mixed methods and qualitative approaches. As I wanted to gain a contextual understanding of how individuals perceive and respond to situations on a small scale, and to collect rich, descriptive data rather than numerical data for generalising social trends (Bryman, 2008; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Silverman, 2017), I eliminated both quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Instead, I chose a qualitative approach, as it aligned closely with the *what* and *how* research questions guiding this study (Silverman, 2017).

3.3.1 Data Collection Method - Interviews

Qualitative research offers several data collection methods, including interviews, focus groups, document analysis, observations, and case studies (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Silverman, 2017). For this study, I sought to engage participants in reflective dialogue based on their experiences. As such, interviews and focus groups emerged as two potential methods. While focus groups can efficiently gather collective data from multiple participants with shared lived experience within a short timeframe (Bryman, 2008), I ultimately chose to conduct semi-structured individual interviews for several reasons.

Given the diversity of the participant groups and the nature of the research study, it was important to acknowledge that this study could be perceived as sensitive. In educational research, sensitivity can arise from various factors, including potential consequences for participants or others, power dynamics, situational and contextual circumstances, cultural considerations, and the risk of exposure (Cohen et al., 2018). Participants in this study might recount, or choose not to recount, experiences that could involve other community members or colleagues in a group setting.

Bearing in mind the confidentiality considerations outlined in Section 3.2.3, I wanted to create an environment where participants could share authentic reflections in a one-to-one setting, without fear of being exposed. Individual interviews also allowed for the collection of more personal, nuanced data rather than a collective perspective. Additionally, using semi-structured interviews enabled me to tailor the sequencing of questions to each participant, incorporate prompts or probes as needed, and maintain flexibility, an approach particularly important when interviewing marginalised groups (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.3.2 Preparation of Research Documents

In accordance with the REC guidelines and using the templates provided on DCU's Research Support webpage, the following documents were prepared:

- **Plain Language Statement (Appendix F)**
- **Informed Consent Form (Appendix G)**
- **ISL Translations of Research Documents (Appendix H):** To ensure accessibility of the research documents for deaf participants (Harris et al., 2009), I translated the PLS and Informed Consent Form into ISL. These videos were shared with all participants via a Google Drive link and included in the body of an email alongside the written documents.

- **Participant Demographic Questionnaires (Appendix I):** I used Google Forms to collect demographic information and confirm that participants met the inclusion criteria. I asked these questions in real time, immediately prior to each interview.
- **Participant Interview Questions (Appendix J):** I drafted questions for each participant group and mapped to the research questions to ensure their relevance and alignment with the study’s aims.

3.3.3 Participant Sample Group

All participants involved in this research study were over the age of 18. Table 3.1 outlines the three distinct participant groups, each with specific inclusion criteria. In determining the sample size, I selected a minimum of six participants from each group. This number was considered sufficient to generate rich, in-depth qualitative data within the timeframe available for this research study.

Table 3.1

Participant Sample Group

Participant Group	Inclusion Criteria
Group 1 – Deaf Students	Current HE students or graduates who availed of interpreting support, and who have experience as the only deaf student in their course or as part of a co-enrolled group of deaf students.
Group 2 – Interpreters	Individuals who have worked, or are currently working, as an interpreter in HE, with experience interpreting for either a single deaf student or a co-enrolled group of deaf students.
Group 3 – Lecturers	Individuals who have worked, or are currently working as a lecturer in HE, and who have experience of teaching either a single deaf student or a co-enrolled group of deaf students with an interpreter present.

3.3.4 Pilot Interviews

In preparation for the data collection with participants, pilot interviews were conducted with one individual from each participant group during April and May 2023. These pilot interviews allowed me to assess the flow and duration of the interview process, practice my interviewing techniques, and obtain direct feedback from participants regarding the clarity of the research documents, the structure of the interview, and overall interview style (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018; Kimotho, 2025; Silverman, 2017). All pilot participants were known to me and agreed to provide feedback following the interview. Two pilot interviews were conducted in-person and one online. All interviews were recorded via Zoom. Recording the pilot interviews proved highly beneficial, as it provided insights into improving the setup for future interviews, particularly those conducted in-person through ISL.

One of the in-person pilot interviews was carried out in spoken English. For this, I scheduled a Zoom meeting, positioned the laptop between the participant and myself, and turned off the camera, allowing the interview to be recorded with audio only. The second in-person pilot interview was conducted in ISL. I followed a similar setup but positioned the laptop on a nearby surface to ensure both the participant and I were visible on camera. Upon reviewing the footage, I noted that we appeared slightly distant from the screen and were positioned slightly to the side to face each other, which could hinder transcription accuracy. To improve the setup for future in-person ISL interviews, I decided to use two cameras: one facing the participant and one facing me. To achieve this, I scheduled a Zoom meeting and joined from my mobile phone as a participant. I placed my mobile in front of the laptop with its camera facing me and positioned a webcam connected to the laptop via a USB cable, directly in front of the participant. This setup worked well, ensuring that we were clearly visible and facing the cameras, which in turn facilitated easier and more accurate data transcription.

Pilot participants were asked to provide feedback on the PLS and Informed Consent Form, specifically regarding their clarity and the participants' understanding of the study objectives. No suggestions for amendments were made, and therefore no changes were required. Regarding the demographic questions posed prior to the interviews, one participant sought clarification on the meaning of a particular question and the options presented. Based on this feedback, I ensured that all participants received a clear explanation of this question to support consistency in responses. In relation to the interview questions, two participants provided feedback on the sequencing and suggested additional questions that might be worth

including. As a result, I revised the sequencing and wording of the questions and added one new question related to group work following the second pilot interview.

With respect to my interview style, I received feedback during the first pilot interview with a participant from *Group 3 – Lecturers* that I reciprocated too much during the conversation. I took this feedback on board for the next two pilot interviews. However, during the pilot interview with a participant from *Group 1 – Deaf Students*, I received feedback that I appeared somewhat ‘cold’ and did not engage or reciprocate. This perception may have resulted from my conscious effort to apply the earlier feedback, my pre-existing social relationship with the participant, or from my heightened awareness of the ethical considerations associated with my insider-researcher role (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). It may also reflect cultural and linguistic norms within the Deaf Community, where emphasis is placed on being understood and valued rather than simply being studied (Harris et al., 2009; Singleton et al., 2014). I used this feedback to refine my interview style going forward, aiming for a balanced approach that fostered rapport and helped participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Data from the pilot interviews were included in the overall analysis, as participants gave valuable insights into their lived experiences, and no major changes were made to the research documents or participant sample group (Ismail et al., 2018; Kimotho, 2025). Following a three-month period of reflection and refinement of the interview questions, recruitment of participants was then initiated.

3.3.5 Sampling and Recruitment of Participants

When selecting an appropriate sampling strategy for this study, I considered whether to use probability or non-probability sampling. This decision was guided by factors such as the representativeness and parameters of the sample, accessibility of the population, and the size and nature of the target groups (Cohen et al., 2018). Given this was a small-scale qualitative study with clearly defined parameters and targeted participant groups, I opted for non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling encompasses various methods; in this study, I initially employed purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, participants are strategically selected, often based on the researcher’s judgement, to gain in-depth insights into a unique or specific issue from individuals with relevant roles or expertise (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018). Snowball sampling involves using existing participants to recommend others for the study. This can be particularly useful for sensitive research or when

access to the population is challenging, especially in the case of marginalised and underrepresented groups (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Both sampling methods were approved by the REC.

I was able to identify an initial purposive sample for all three participant groups by leveraging my professional and personal contacts, based on my educational and professional background. However, recruiting participants from *Group 3 - Lecturers* proved difficult. Despite relying more heavily on snowball sampling for this group, I received little to no response. Therefore, I submitted an amendment to the REC, to include volunteer sampling which was subsequently approved. In volunteer sampling, the researcher invites participants to come forward in response to an advertisement (Cohen et al., 2018). I created a graphic accompanied by explanatory text about the study and shared it on two of my public social media platforms: LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter). These posts were widely circulated, receiving over 8,500 views across both platforms (Appendix K). As a result, several individuals from *Group 3 – Lecturers* expressed their interest in participating.

The primary method of contacting potential research participants was via email. In cases where only mobile numbers were available, or where I was connected with individuals through social media, I reached out using WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. The message included a brief overview of the study and an invitation to provide an email address for future correspondence if they were interested in learning more. All participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and that they were under no obligation to participate due to any personal relationship with me.

A total of 40 individuals were either contacted or expressed interest in participating in the study. Ultimately, 21 participants took part, as outlined in Table 3.2. The remaining 19 individuals did not participate for various reasons. One email failed to deliver. Two individuals shared the invitation with their networks. Two did not meet the inclusion criteria. Three were unavailable due to time constraints. Three responded after all interviews had been completed. Three either cancelled or did not attend their scheduled interviews and did not re-engage. Five did not respond after initial email contact.

Table 3.2*Individuals Contacted for Study*

Group	Contact Methods	Contacted	Interviewed
		<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Deaf Students	All 13 individuals initially contacted via WhatsApp or Messenger, followed by email correspondence.	13	7
Interpreters	Three individuals contacted via email. Nine contacted initially via WhatsApp, followed by email correspondence.	12	8
Lecturers	Seven individuals contacted via email. Eight individuals contacted me through Twitter, LinkedIn, and email to express their interest in participating.	15	6
Total		40	21

3.3.6 Interviews

A total of 21 interviews were conducted across the three participant groups, including the three pilot interviews. The three pilot interviews took place in April and May 2023, followed by 14 interviews between August and October 2023. The remaining four interviews were conducted in October and November 2024, after I return to study having deferred the 2023-24 academic year. Participants were given the option of having interviews either in person or online, at a time and date convenient to them. Five interviews were conducted in-person, at locations chosen by the participants, while the remaining 16 were conducted online.

Interviews were conducted in either ISL or English, depending on the participant's preference. All deaf student participants used ISL, with one individual opting to code-blend ISL and spoken English (Young & Temple, 2014). Most interpreter participants checked with me in advance to ask which language modality I preferred for the interview, as they were aware I use both. I chose to conduct all interviews with interpreters in English for ease of transcription; however, many interpreters code-switched between both modalities (Bishop & Hicks, 2005), to convey additional meaning or to provide visual references to the lecture or classroom setups

during the interviews. All interviews carried out with lecturers were conducted in English. In total, nearly 13 hours of interviews were recorded, with durations ranging from 20 to 60 minutes. The average interview length was 36 minutes across the 21 participants. These interviews provided rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences and perspectives, forming a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis.

3.4 Approach to Data Analysis

3.4.1 Transcribing the Data

As stated previously, all interviews, including in-person interviews, were recorded using Zoom. Relevant audio files (for spoken English interviews) and video files (for ISL interviews) were downloaded for transcription. The majority of interviews were transcribed by third-party service providers as approved by the REC. This process was outlined to participants in the PLS and reiterated during the interviews. Data processing agreements were established with the service providers to ensure compliance with DCU's Data Protection Policy. All spoken English interviews (N = 15) were transcribed by a company specialising in transcribing spoken languages into written text. Of the ISL interviews (N = 6), three were translated into written English by a registered Deaf Interpreter, while the remaining three were translated by me.

Once the transcription files were returned to me by the service providers, I reviewed all transcripts for accuracy by listening and watching the original recordings to ensure the written text reflected the appropriate context and captured any missing information. I also reformatted the transcriptions into a standardised layout, as there were inconsistencies across many of the files received from both third-party service providers. Following this, I removed potential identifying information, as previously discussed in Section 3.2.3.

3.4.2 Translating the Data

While transcribing spoken languages presents its own difficulties, such as the loss of tone, pauses, and non-verbal cues (Cohen et al., 2018), transcribing sign language data introduces even greater complexities due to its visual-spatial modality. Before sign language data can be transcribed, it must first be translated, as the process involves converting content from one language to another (Young & Temple, 2014). This translation, much like interpreting, is influenced by several factors including the transcriber's perception of what is being signed, linguistic decisions such as grammar and syntax choices, and additional context conveyed

through the signing space, reference points and non-manual features like role-shifts and facial expressions (Johnson & Rash, 1990; O’Baill & Matthews, 2000; Perniss, 2015; Young & Temple, 2014).

For example, when I received the transcription files of the ISL interviews from the third-party service provider, I reviewed the video recording alongside the transcripts and noted differences in how I interpreted what the participant signed. I amended these transcripts based on my perception, as I was the one who was present in these interviews and had access to additional contextual knowledge that may not have been available to the third-party service provider. Furthermore, in the absence of specialised annotation software for sign language analysis, which would allow for the documentation and coding of linguistic elements such as facial expressions, non-manual features, there was a risk that the translated transcript might not fully reflect the original interview (Crasborn, 2015; Perniss, 2015). To mitigate this risk, I included notes within the transcript using asterisks and colour coding to indicate relevant non-verbal communication or instances where participants shifted between modalities. Appendix L contains extracts from two interviews where these annotations were applied in the transcript.

3.4.3 Verification of the Data

As outlined in my REC application, the transcripts were sent to participants for validation, providing them with an opportunity to make clarifications and amendments. This process also invited relational responsibility from participants, ensuring that the data was anonymised to a degree they felt adequately protected their identity (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Forbat & Henderson, 2005). Where I identified elements of the data that could potentially be recognisable despite anonymisation, these were flagged with participants for review. Responses varied: some participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcript; others requested amendments or the removal of data they perceived as potentially identifiable; and some did not respond within the timeframe provided. Interestingly, despite the challenges associated with translating sign language data, none of the participants interviewed in ISL who responded requested any amendments to the translation. All audio and video recordings were then destroyed following verification of the transcripts.

3.4.4 Analysis of the Data

When considering a framework for data analysis, I explored both narrative analysis and thematic analysis. Narrative analysis is typically used when the researcher aims to examine the

personal stories and accounts of participants while exploring the social-cultural and historical context that shapes their experience. Thematic analysis, by contrast, offers a more flexible approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Bryman, 2008).

I chose to use Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) framework for reflexive thematic analysis, which offers a flexible approach to qualitative data analysis. Given the three distinct participant groups and the unique roles they played, this flexibility was particularly valuable in identifying not only explicit, surface-level patterns but also deeper, underlying meanings within the data. The six-phase framework accommodates both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) approaches and supports coding at both semantic (explicit) and latent (interpretative) levels. Braun and Clarke emphasise that reflexive thematic analysis is not about rigid rules or focused on quantifying data; rather it involves thoughtful, interpretative engagement with the dataset. Themes are actively generated through this reflexive analysis and are underpinned by a central organising concept that captures shared meaning across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021; Clarke, 2018)

The first phase involved familiarising myself with the dataset through transcribing, translating, verifying, and reading the data, while also making informal manual notes. The dataset was then imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to support the subsequent stages of the analysis.

Appendix M provides screenshots and images illustrating the second through fifth stages of the reflexive thematic analysis process.

For the second phase, I systematically coded each data item. Most codes were semantic in nature, and many data segments aligned with multiple codes. In total, 113 codes were identified and linked to over 2,000 data segments, referred to as *references* within NVivo, across the dataset. Table M1 provides an overview of this coding process.

The third phase involved generating initial themes. Figure M1 outlines the manual and digital techniques used to support my thought process and visualisation. All 113 codes were printed, individually cut out, and physically arranged through a process of grouping and reorganising them into patterns and potential themes. A total of 25 initial themes were generated. These were then replicated in a digital mind map and subsequently organised within NVivo for the next phase.

The fourth phase focused on developing and reviewing the initial themes. During this stage, I revisited each code and its associated references to identify additional information or variables, and assessed whether statements conveyed a positive, negative, or neutral sentiment. Figure M2 provides an example of this coding on process. As a result of this review, some themes were renamed, some references were uncoded or reassigned.

In the fifth phase, I reviewed the codes within each theme against my three research questions. I identified 11 codes that did not align and subsequently removed them from the analysis. I then examined the frequency and distribution of references, looking for similarities or groupings. Figure M3 illustrates the various iterations of the thematic map, created both manually and digitally, which helped to refine and define the final thematic framework presented in Figure M4. I then recreated the thematic map in NVivo and transferred each code individually into its respective category.

This marked the transition into the final phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis: producing the report. Before presenting the findings, it is essential to contextualise the analysis by introducing the participants that underpin the study. The following section presents an overview of the three participant groups, outlining their background, experience, and relevance to the research.

3.5 Participant Profiles and Demographics

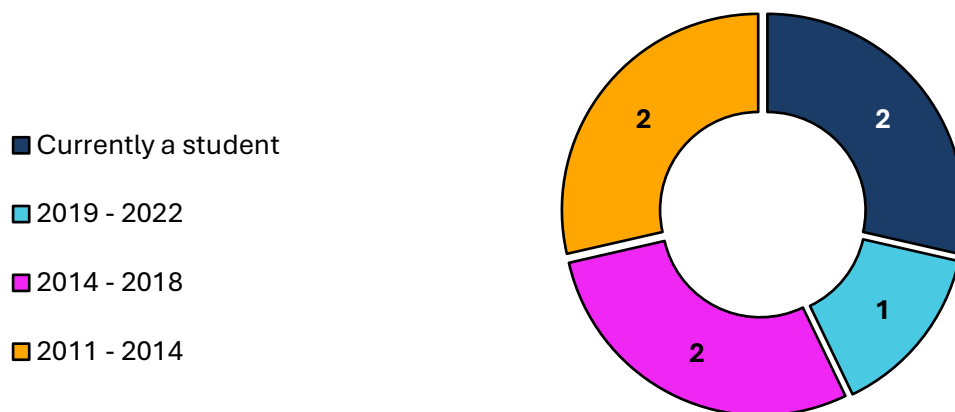
3.5.1 Group 1 – Deaf Students

Group 1 consisted of seven deaf students and graduates who accessed interpreting supports during their time in HE. Three participants reported using interpreters for between 2 and 4 years, while four had 5 or more years of experience. Notably, none had prior experience with educational interpreters before entering HE. At the time of the interviews, two participants were enrolled in HE, while the remaining five had completed their studies.

Figure 3.1 shows the most recent year in which participants used interpreting supports in HE. Two participants were current students (i.e. 2023 or later), one last used supports between 2019 and 2022, two between 2014 and 2018, and two between 2011 and 2014.

Figure 3.1

Most Recent Year Deaf Students Aailed of ISL Interpreting Support



Participants studied a diverse range of disciplines, with five having pursued additional HE qualifications, either in the same field or in different disciplines, and some having progressed to postgraduate study. Based on the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015), the fields of study represented were:

- Arts and Humanities
- Business, Administration, and Law
- Education
- Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction
- Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics
- Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information

Table 3.3 below presents participants' experience of HE settings. Six had experience as the only deaf student on a mainstream course, with two of these also attending courses that included co-enrolled groups of deaf students. One participant had no experience as a single deaf student but studied in two types of co-enrolled settings, one mainstream and one specifically for deaf students. Of the six single deaf students, five reported being unaware of any other deaf student on campus using interpreters, suggesting they may have been the only such student at their HEI. Among those with co-enrolled group experience, the number of deaf students per course ranged from four to 15.

Table 3.3*Deaf Students' Experience of Higher Education Settings*

Pseudonyms	Single deaf student	Co-enrolled (mainstream course)	Co-enrolled (deaf group)
Sophie	Yes	-	-
Simon	Yes	-	-
Sabrina	Yes	Yes	-
Sinéad	Yes	-	Yes
Siobhán	Yes	-	-
Seán	Yes	-	-
Sorcha	-	Yes	Yes
Total	6	2	2

Participants were asked to select the identity they most aligned with, based on definitions provided in the questionnaire. Four identified as 'native signers', using sign language as their primary language and accessing services through interpreters. Three identified as being 'bilingual', using a mixture of spoken language and sign language equally in daily life and accessing services through interpreters. No participants identified as 'oral', defined as using spoken language as their main language and only using interpreters to access services.

3.5.2 Group 2 – Interpreters

Group 2 consisted of eight ISL-English interpreters, all of whom had experience of working as an educational interpreter in HE settings. All interpreters began working in HE settings within one year of graduating. Six interpreters reported receiving no formal training on educational interpreting as part of their initial qualification. Two interpreters did receive such training and rated it 4 out of 5 on a Likert scale, indicating that they agreed the training was adequate. Following qualification, six interpreters had not undertaken any formal continuous professional development in this area, though they engaged informally through peer discussions and self-directed learning. The remaining two interpreters reported completing both formal and informal training.

Figure 3.2

Interpreters' Years of Experience

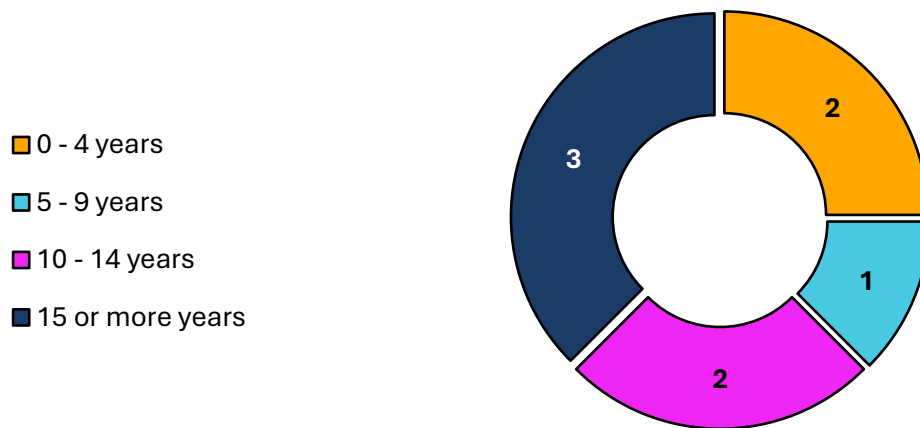


Figure 3.2 shows the professional experience of the interpreters: three participants had 15 or more years of experience, two had between 10 and 14 years, one had between 5 and 9 years, and two had up to 4 years of experience.

Table 3.4

Interpreters' Experiences of Higher Education Settings

Pseudonyms	Single deaf student	Co-enrolled (mainstream course)	Co-enrolled (deaf group)
Isla	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ian	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iris	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issac	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ivy	Yes	Yes	Yes
Imogen	Yes	-	-
Ingrid	Yes	Yes	-
Isabelle	Yes	-	-
Total	8	6	5

Table 3.4 above summarises interpreters' experience in various HE settings. All eight interpreters had worked with a single deaf student on a mainstream course. Six had also interpreted for co-enrolled groups on mainstream courses, and five of these had experience with courses specifically for deaf people. Additionally, two interpreters had experience interpreting in pre-tertiary settings.

3.5.3 Group 3 – Lecturers

Group 3 comprised six lecturers, all of whom had experience of working in HE settings and with deaf students and interpreters. Three lecturers held formal teaching qualifications, while the other three did not. Figure 3.3 shows the teaching experience of lecturers: four had 15 or more years of experience, one had between 10 and 14 years, and one had between 5 and 9 years.

Figure 3.3

Lecturers' Years of Experience

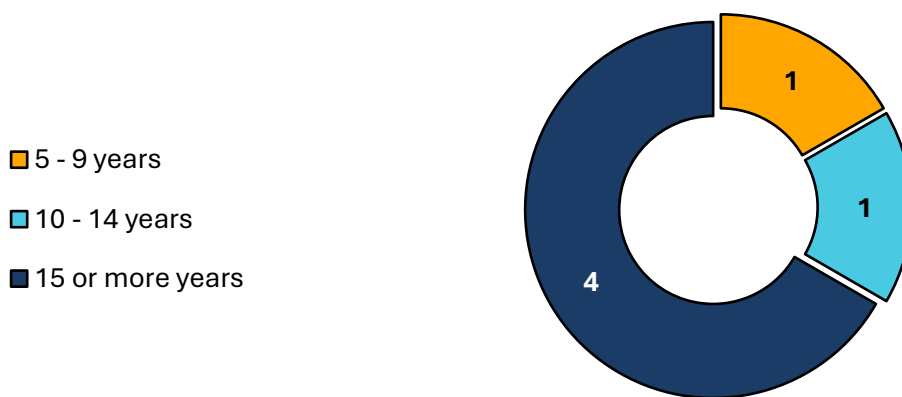


Table 3.5 below summarises lecturers' experience across various HE settings. Four lecturers had experience of teaching a single deaf student, with two of these also having experience of teaching co-enrolled groups on courses specifically for deaf people. Three lecturers had experience of teaching co-enrolled groups on a mainstream course.

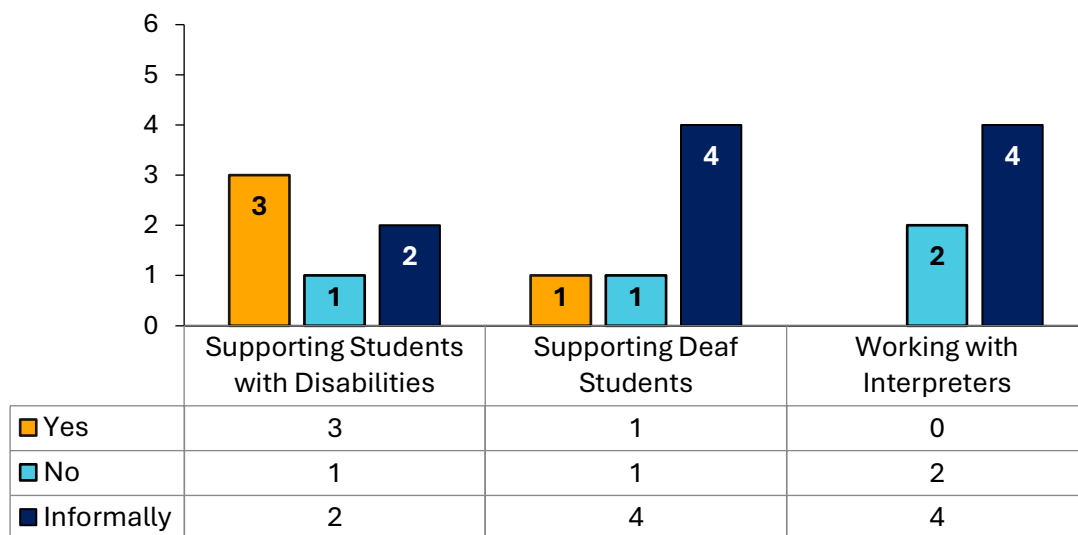
Table 3.5

Lecturers' Experience of Higher Education Settings

Pseudonyms	Single deaf student	Co-enrolled (mainstream course)	Co-enrolled (deaf group)
Laura	-	Yes	-
Lucy	Yes	-	Yes
Lily	-	Yes	-
Liam	Yes	-	-
Lorraine	Yes	-	-
Luke	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total	4	3	2

Figure 3.4

Formal Training Received by Lecturers



Note. Informally was defined as engaging with support services or reading materials, etc.

Figure 3.4 above is a chart illustrating lecturers' responses of receiving training across three areas: (a) supporting SWD in the classroom; (b) supporting deaf students in the classroom; and (c) working with sign language interpreters in educational settings. Responses varied, with some lecturers reporting formal training, others informal learning, and some none at all. Those who had received formal training were asked to rate its usefulness on a Likert scale. Of the three lecturers trained in supporting SWD, two rated it as 5 (*strongly agree*) and one as 4. The sole lecturer who received formal training in supporting deaf students rated it as 4. Notably, no lecturer reported receiving formal training on working with interpreters.

3.6 Research Design Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study are not generalisable to the wider population due to the sample size and sampling methods employed, which may have introduced selection bias and resulted in a sample of individuals with strong views or a heightened awareness of inclusion. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the study, there is a risk that participants may not have shared a fully accurate reflection of their experiences due to concerns about being identified. Nonetheless, steps were taken at the outset of this study to minimise this risk as much as possible.

The study relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews, which are inherently subjective and dependent on participants' recall and willingness to share. The absence of triangulation with other data sources, such as observations or focus groups, limits the ability to corroborate the findings. Additionally, as several interviews were conducted in ISL and subsequently translated, this may have led to the loss of linguistic nuances. The insider-researcher positionality, while fostering trust and depth in participant engagement, may have influenced the dynamics of the interviews and the interpretation of data. Efforts were made to mitigate bias through reflexivity and transparency, but the potential for influence remains.

Despite these limitations, the interviews yielded rich, detailed data that offered deep insights into participants experiences. These findings are explored in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the key findings derived from the data collected across all three participant groups using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis resulted in the identification of five overarching themes: (1) student inclusion, (2) relational dynamics, (3) classroom environment, (4) intricacies of educational interpreting, and (5) capacity building. Appendix N provides a summary of the five themes, their associated subthemes, and notes.

Participants were not selected based on prior working relationships, and it remains unknown whether any had previously worked together. Therefore, their accounts should be treated as independent. In the analysis that follows, quotes from participants are used to illustrate each theme and provide insight into their lived experiences.

To distinguish between participant groups, pseudonyms were assigned using a consistent format: student names begin with *S*, interpreter names with *I*, and lecturer names with *L*. These are listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Pseudonyms of Participants

Deaf Students	Interpreters	Lecturers
Sophie	Isla	Laura
Simon	Ian	Lucy
Sabrina	Iris	Lily
Sinéad	Issac	Liam
Siobhán	Ivy	Lorraine
Seán	Imogen	Luke
Sorcha	Ingrid	
	Isabelle	

Note. Assigned pseudonyms do not reflect or imply the participants' actual gender, nor should they be interpreted as the opposite gender.

4.2 Student Inclusion

One of the first themes identified was student inclusion in HE. All participants shared insights into factors that influenced or shaped the overall experience of deaf students.

4.2.1 Access and Support Mechanisms

All students reported using both interpreting and notetaking support during their time in HE. Some also accessed additional learning support, such as academic writing assistance, tutorials, and proofreading. Most had interpreting support for all modules. Sorcha, part of a mainstream co-enrolled group, shared, “there was always an interpreter there as it provided access to hearing students”, indicating that interpreters were standard practice rather than a specific access support, as the course had both hearing and deaf lecturers. Three students did not have interpreters for all modules, and this was due a variety of reasons. Simon explained this was because his “university was prestigious, and a lot of interpreters struggled”, while Siobhán lacked support for one final-year module due to a last-minute timetable change. Siobhán described their experience when interpreting support was unavailable:

It was really for just one module I had where the interpreters weren't available. During that class, I just focused on the board, trying to understand the terminology that was being used, but it wasn't really explained, so I lost out on a bit of information on that module.

Sophie decided to stop using interpreters and switched to captioning after the first two years because “it wasn't working out” due to the numerical nature of the course. She felt it was difficult for interpreters to keep pace and said, “it was so bad, that I just nodded away pretending to understand”. After trialling captioning, she felt this was “the best support” for her subject. She continued to use interpreters selectively, for discussion-based classes, and would use captioning for lectures with minimal student input. This flexible approach to access supports was echoed by Simon and Sinéad. Sinéad requested reduced interpreter support during her third-year work placement, having used full-time support in first year. She explained she “wanted to become more involved in the hearing world without relying on interpreters”. Simon, in hindsight, preferred not to use interpreters for mathematics and science modules, but only for theory or concept-based subjects like business communications. Simon reflected on his early experience.

I was only 18 years of age at that time, so maybe if I was to go back, I probably wouldn't have used an interpreter and just wrote down information because it was easier for me to concentrate. There were a lot of formulas. It was very technical.

Liam shared that when interpreters were unavailable for the online course, external transcription services were used as an alternative. Although the deaf student in his class preferred interpreters, they “compromised and accepted that would do...”. Liam raised concerns about transcript quality, describing some service providers being “appalling” and producing “very loose notes from an hour and a half of lectures”. Liam expressed a preference for verbatim transcripts, which he felt “was the closest that we'd get to the same experience”.

While students did not report using interpreters for written exams, some interpreters expressed concerns. Ingrid was asked by a lecturer to translate an exam and felt it was inappropriate and not part of her job, as it was not “real time, live information”. Isabelle noted risks when interpreters, unfamiliar with the course content, were used for exams, fearing they could “accidentally give away something”. Ivy described witnessing an interpreter acting as a scribe who was “very very liberal of what they added into that typed transcript”.

All students viewed notetaking support as essential when using interpreters. However, issues were raised across all participant groups regarding consistency, availability, and quality. These included delays in receiving notes, insufficient detail on key discussions and deadlines, and notetaker absences. Lecturers Laura and Lucy reported minimal interaction with the notetakers compared to interpreters, sometimes not knowing who the notetaker was. Luke recalled instances where fellow students were assigned as notetakers by the DSS. He emphasised notetaking is an important skill, and it may “get a little bit complicated” if the deaf student was unhappy with the notes received.

4.2.2 Policies and Support Services

Many students and interpreters perceived a shift in HE in recent years, marked by a growing emphasis on inclusion and a greater receptiveness to change. Sophie described a positive experience while earning her postgraduate qualification at a private college, noting that the institution actively sought alternative solutions: ‘the college looked at other ways to do things rather than leave me out’. In contrast, Simon, who pursued postgraduate studies at a private college, did not benefit from a similar proactive approach. He was informed in his first week that there was no funding to provide interpreters and received no additional supports. As

the course was only six months, he chose not to waste energy “fighting for interpreters” and instead relied on classmates and textbooks. Sabrina compared her experience as a single deaf student in her first university to being part of a co-enrolled group at her second. She questioned whether institutional policies influenced lecturers’ attitude towards inclusion and shared examples of initiatives at her second university, such as lecturers receiving training and free ISL classes for students:

Here at this university, it’s a bit more formal, with a stricter emphasis on inclusion and a clear policy for it. I do wonder what the inclusion policy was like at my first university back then. Perhaps inclusion wasn’t their priority, which could have made the lecturers less bothered. Still, it’s hard to tell.

Four interpreters noted increased awareness of the need for two interpreters in the classroom, attributing this to precedents being set and more interpreters beginning to “stand up” and “insisting” on it. However, they also reported occasional resistance due to funding constraints and interpreter shortages. Ivy disputed this, stating that no changes in practice had occurred and expressing disappointment. Isabelle believed that “newer universities” were more willing to change, linking this to the shift from traditional teaching formats to increased use of virtual learning environments such as Brightspace or Moodle.

Participants were asked about their interactions with DSS, particularly regarding interpreting provision. Most students reported that engagement focused on coordinating access supports and resolving issues, including interpreter scheduling, availability, change requests, and complaints about interpreting and notetaking. Interpreter responses varied: some had minimal contact with the DSS, while others engaged more regularly. Ian described frequent “catch-up meetings” to discuss “problematic issues”. Isabelle, who worked with a student for five years, said she got to know the DSS “quite well”. She added that it was “the only college that actually interacted with the interpreters to talk to us about our role. Other colleges didn’t really want to know you, they just wanted to know you were there for the job...”. Isabelle also met with the DSS, with the interpreting agency’s support, to advocate for a second interpreter due to the course’s intensity. Isla recalled a similar experience:

I approached the agency and said this class needs two interpreters. And basically, they said ‘*Can you go in because they don’t engage very well*’. So, I went in-person, went into

the office, and met with disability services, and they straight away provided a second interpreter when I explained my role.

Issac and Ivy shared the view that the DSS can be a valuable source of support in building relationships and clarifying the interpreter's role with lecturers. Issac described the DSS as being "a really great tool" that could "make our life a lot easier because we can really focus on the interpretation". Ivy emphasised the importance of forming "a bit of team" not only with the student and lecturer but also with the DSS, which could help "clarify things" or support the interpreter when "a lecturer is particularly obstinate or stuck in their ways". However, Ivy also noted that "quite often the message that has come back from Disability Services is *there is nothing we can do*", and described how, towards the end of her career as an educational interpreter, DSS staff were "not good and did not have a clue...".

Among the lecturer participants, most reported little to no direct engagement with the DSS. Laura, Lucy, and Lily, who taught co-enrolled groups of deaf students, stated that interpreter provision was managed at the programme level, and they did not interact directly with the DSS. Lorraine reported having no prior contact with the DSS; she only became aware of the student and interpreter on the first day of class. She reflected that earlier communication from the DSS would have "added to all of our experiences" and said, "I would have always felt we could have probably done an awful lot more for them if there'd been a bit of planning and preparation". This mirrored Liam and Luke's experience, who described DSS engagement as "more practical" in nature, focused on booking interpreters rather than providing "guidelines" about working with interpreters.

4.2.3 Experiencing a Sense of Difference

Many of the student participants reflected on moments in HE where they felt different from their peers because they were deaf. Simon, whose first exposure to a mainstream setting was at HE, characterised himself as being "quite vulnerable and passive", feeling "very isolated, very lonely". Sabrina also experienced "loneliness" and "isolation" during her first university experience as a single student, which contributed to a lack of motivation for learning. Sophie shared how applying to college through DARE made her feel unequal: "I didn't feel equal to others, and I saw myself as possibly the stupid one". She later reflected that this feeling of low self-esteem may have stemmed from her schooling experience and that she struggled with

her identity in a mainstream environment. Seán described experiencing “a lot of anxiety going in and being the only deaf student, everyone looking at you, you’re going in with an interpreter...”.

For some students, it was the interpreter or lecturer who contributed to this sense of difference. Both Sophie and Sorcha described instances where the interpreter arrived late to class. Sorcha felt “frustrated because I felt I wasn’t equal” when her lecturer chose to proceed without waiting for the interpreter. Sophie recalled feeling exposed when the lecturer publicly commented on the interpreter’s late arrival:

There was one time when the interpreter arrived into the classroom late and that made me feel embarrassed, because the lecturer diverted the attention of the class to me by saying something like ‘*Oh your interpreter arrived late*’. Was it the interpreter who arrived late or was it me? That was embarrassing for me.

Interpreters were also mindful of the feelings described by the students. Ivy acknowledged that “maybe the deaf student was a little bit isolated, because of the fact that were an ISL user, but also just because it’s the first year”. Iris noted a “lack of confidence” among deaf students when engaging with their peers, especially if they were the only deaf student, describing it as a potentially “daunting experience”. Imogen echoed this, explaining that some students preferred not to ask for clarification in front of others and would instead inform the interpreter privately. She felt she had to respect this choice, as she did not want to put the “student in an awkward position... that everybody will be looking at them”. Lorraine, who had no prior awareness of the student until the first day, reflected that an initial introduction might have made the student feel more “comfortable” or “given them confidence” to engage with the class.

4.2.4 Social Connectedness

All interpreters repeatedly highlighted the crucial role of social interaction in shaping the HE experience for students, particularly those who were the only deaf student. Interpreters shared experiences of interpreting during lunchtime, coffee breaks, and the strategies they used to foster connections between deaf and hearing students. Isla noted deaf students “don’t have the opportunity, or don’t have the support in social settings, to kind of communicate with their peers”, a sentiment expressed directly to her by the deaf students. She would interpret *ad hoc* if she spotted a deaf student near their peers at the coffee dock or during lunch, “because

they [deaf student] wanted to build up relationships”. Iris interpreted during lunch, recognising it as a space “where all the learning and the bonding happens and the banter and stuff”, despite the fatigue of interpreting solo for several hours:

You might have a deaf person who is particularly young, who is trying to meet people, and you’d really you know put in an effort to try and facilitate that, you know? Because they have no communication with anybody else. ... But if you’re a single interpreter, you know, that’s really, really challenging. You might be absolutely exhausted...

Issac emphasised the value of “passive incidental learning”, saying he would stay back to interpret even “if it means me skipping lunch break for a few days, I will skip lunch break, I want them to have those allies in the class that aren’t me”. Ian echoed this, linking social connection to access to informal learning:

It is not just a social thing; it is that incidental learning that hearing people have. People talk about water cooler moments that deaf people do not get the opportunity to have. So, they do not necessarily know the deadline and how some things have been submitted and who is doing what in a project.

Ingrid would interpret hallway conversations if she sensed the student was “intrigued about what was going on” but did not do so for co-enrolled groups explaining “they had each other”. Imogen described a balanced approach, noting that “sometimes it helps that I am not there”. She observed deaf and hearing students using mobile phones to communicate when she stepped away. Isabelle highlighted the importance of the interpreter having soft skills and being “a bit more open to letting the social stuff happen” to create an environment that made both deaf and hearing students feel comfortable to interact. Ivy echoed this, sharing a strategy used by a colleague to facilitate social engagement:

We would be having our conversations and then the deaf student might say something ‘*Yesterday the weather was terrible, and I got rained on and I got absolutely soaked*’ and then my colleague interpreter would say ‘Yes’, and then they would just look around, they might catch the eye of one of the hearing students and they would say ‘*[name removed] was just saying they got caught yesterday in the rain, they got absolutely*

soaked' and then the hearing student would say '*Same happened to me*' and the next thing my colleague was just able to switch into interpreter [mode] again.

Some students also spoke about their social connections with hearing peers. Sorcha noted that all hearing students could sign, by virtue of the course they were on, so she had no issues having social conversations. At her second university, Sabrina initially felt like “the odd one out, thinking that other hearing students saw me as a bit of a burden”. This “feeling faded away” as communication improved through the funded ISL classes, helping to create “a sense of connection”. Simon, who previously described feelings of isolation, also struggled to connect due to communication barriers:

My best friend was the interpreter! I didn't really have any friends in university, so at break time the interpreter would leave, and I would be on my own. I know the interpreter wanted to have a break. But, for me, they were the only person I could actually communicate with.

4.3 Relational Dynamics

Another central theme in the interview data concerns participants' perception of roles within the student-interpreter-lecturer triad. They shared views on what constitutes an effective working relationship and described their experiences of interaction with each other.

4.3.1 The Role of the Deaf Student

As noted earlier, students typically engaged the DSS to coordinate and address access support issues. However, many reported the additional workload this required. Sophie, who used a combination of interpreting and captioning, sometimes liaised with lecturers before class to determine the appropriate support needed for the class. She described feeling a sense of “burden” and “wasn't equal to other students” because of the “additional responsibility” of emailing notes to interpreters. She believed this was the interpreters' responsibility and took away “actual studying time” that could have been spent preparing questions for the class.

Siobhán, with DSS approval, regularly wrote down keywords from course materials uploaded by lecturers to the virtual learning environment and met interpreters an hour before class to discuss ISL signs. Seán proactively emailed lecturers in advance to inform them he was

deaf and that interpreters would be present. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he recalled having to “remind” a lecturer to enable captions on YouTube recordings of lectures. Sinéad, preparing for a presentation exam, worked with her interpreter to “discuss how to interpret the content properly” and “met twice to practice”, ensuring they could “match the tone and emotions”.

Several interpreters shared similar views to those of the students. Isla explained that she met with the student over tea on their first day “as a way of getting to know their signing style” and noted that lecturers often expected students to relay information:

The expectation from lecturers sometimes is that the deaf students will provide me with the information because... they say, *‘Oh, it’s already on Moodle and can the student not provide it to me?’* and I’m going, *‘But they’re a student just like everyone else’*. They shouldn’t have the additional burden to pass on the material to me. Also, the expectation... that the students will let us know of timetable changes, room changes.

Ivy and Isabelle echoed this concern. Ivy felt that it was “not appropriate” to place this responsibility on a student, while Isabelle believed there was “too much responsibility or there is too much, kind of expected of students especially when they are brand new to college and [have] no clue what they are doing, which is the same as any other student”. However, she noted it is the students’ responsibility to “flag” and “seek the help” they need, a view shared by Issac, Ian, and Iris. They stressed the need for students to know “where their path was are for questions”, to “utilise the interpreter as best as they can” and to not “be afraid to look for what you [deaf student] want”.

While all lecturers in the study believed the primary role of deaf students was to learn and engage with the course, many acknowledged the unique contributions and awareness-raising that stem from their lived experience. Laura, Lucy, and Lily described how deaf students in their classes contributed to discussions by drawing on personal experiences. Laura, who regularly invited students to share their educational journeys with the class, encouraged deaf students to contribute. She described their presentation as “absolutely fabulous” because it reflected the student’s “firsthand experience and knowledge” of the content she was teaching, though she wondered “if they weren’t deaf, they mightn’t have done it”.

Lily remarked, “it wouldn’t be correct to say that their role is exactly the same, because I actually think they bring added value...” and elaborated:

So, I think their role is like, it's not that they should be held up as, '*Okay, you're here now, teach us all about the Deaf Community*'. That is not what their role is. They're there to achieve their degree but there is that kind of experiential piece that's added to it in the same way that having multiple perspectives in any group is a good thing.

The three other lecturers described additional responsibilities and challenges associated with the deaf student's role. Lorraine noted the difficulty of covering material in 50 minutes, especially when accounting for interpreting lag, which led to "not as expecting as much and, whether that's fairly or unfairly" in terms of the deaf student's engagement in the class. Luke believed "students should be allowed to be students", and that it is not their "responsibility" to raise awareness among lecturers. However, he acknowledged that this does happen and that deaf students "carry that burden". Liam was clear the deaf student's role was "very different, and it shouldn't be". He acknowledged the extra effort required of both disabled and deaf students to "take some kind of responsibility... because of the ignorance that's out there from people like me that haven't got enough experience...". He added:

I'd love to think deaf students were able to get into college and not have to think about that at all, that everything is just laid on the same way as it is for everybody else, but I'm 100% sure that's never the case.

4.3.2 The Role of the Interpreter

The consensus among participants was that the interpreter's primary function was to facilitate communication and relay information. Many students emphasised their role was to "relay", "deliver" and "translate" all classroom content, whether from lecturers or peers, to "foster inclusion in the classroom". Lecturers similarly understood the interpreter's role as facilitating communication between themselves, deaf students, and other students. Several referred to interpreters as conduits for access. Laura viewed interpreters as "enabling access to what was going on in the classroom through ISL". Luke described their role as ensuring "the content of the lecture or the programme is accessible", while Liam said they are "providing access on an equal basis". Lily stated they are "providing equality of access, but hopefully also equity of outcomes in how that happens". However, Lily also highlighted the importance of interpreters blending into the classroom environment.

I'm torn in answering that question. Is it, is it that they're to the foreground in supporting deaf students in, I suppose, interpreting and understanding the content, but in some ways also they should be in the background so that they don't become like a major character to the point where they're overshadowing the general dynamic, I suppose of the group.

This idea of blending in was also noted by several interpreters. Imogen expressed frustration at being made the "focus of attention" by other students. Isla felt it was important to "blend in" and not to "make people stand out", a view shared by Isabelle. Isla and Isaac discussed how dressing appropriately helped them to fit in and impacted the deaf students they supported. Issac recalled his experiencing interpreting for an arts-based course:

It was an arty, kind of, creative kind of course and everyone is running around in... paint dripped trousers and that, and in comes the interpreter who, like, stands out like a sore thumb, right? ... The next day I went in there, I wore crappy old jeans, I still wore my plain top, you know, but I just tried to fit in a little bit better because it was the one thing the deaf student kept on saying *'I already stand out, I don't need to stand like I already have you with me and I've a note taker sitting in the back, like I don't need you stand out any more than you do already'*.

Isla echoed this sentiment, noting the conflicting perceptions from lecturers and students, and the impact this may have:

First impression to a lecturer on the first day, will always be very smart, because I find that I get more prep if they perceive me as the professional, but for the deaf student it's more important, you're more informally dressed, and this came as a comment from a student many years ago, they said, *'Oh thank God, you dress like casual'*. ... *'I don't look like I'm walking around with a social worker when I'm with you'*. ... and I felt like, oh my God, it's really important how we dress, because they are walking from lecture to lecture with me most often, so you want to blend in.

Many participants noted that interpreters were expected to and did perform tasks not typically carried out in other interpreting settings. As referenced earlier, interpreters met students in advance to discuss signs, signing styles, building rapport and support interpreting in social settings. Interpreters also stayed after class to engage with lecturers or others as necessary. Siobhán felt strongly that post-class check-ins were part of the interpreter's role, so they could "let me know about important things that came up". If the interpreter left immediately, she felt it was not "professional" and there was no relationship there. Sabrina recalled that in her first university, "interpreters simply came and went", which contrasted with her second university experience where a team of in-house interpreters was present.

Ingrid stated, "if they needed to communicate with the lecturer after class, of course I am there, that is what my job is". Ivy noted "most of the time, it is not a case of five o'clock, I will see you tomorrow and then I am out of there". Lorraine observed that interpreters often stayed behind with the student while others left the classroom, indicating the deaf student had a question or wanted to "check-in".

Some interpreters were asked to provide additional learning support, such as translating materials, transcribing assignments, or proofreading. While some accepted these tasks, either as part of their role or as additional paid work, others felt it was inappropriate. Isla was uncomfortable when a student asked her to transcribe their assignment. When she informed the agency, they responded that it was "agreed with the college that interpreters can do that". Iris noted that many interpreters take on a "very supportive role", particularly around English language comprehension. She felt there was a "very fine line" in assisting with written support, warning that "the downside to that is that the lecturer, or teacher or facilitator has no idea there's a struggle going on".

Some students and interpreters described interpreters inadvertently taking on an advocacy role. Sophie explained that deaf students may experience "isolation" or feel "lost" and that "interpreters usually know more information, they have more experience so they may need to advocate for the deaf person". Many interpreters acknowledged that their familiarity with HE settings and shared language with deaf students often led them to share or signpost information. Issac said he "would spend a lot of time in the first few weeks" helping students understand "what, where and who to go" in hopes of "empowering them to do it themselves".

Iris stated that while she was not an advocate, she often had to "adjust" her interpreting style in educational settings, sometimes redirecting or advising students:

It's a hard challenge at times when there's a gap in the service and you're wondering ok, is this compromising the view of what my role is by stepping in or am I actually, you know, facilitating in the sense that the deaf person doesn't just, you know, experience whatever anxiety in that situation.

Siobhán echoed this and described a situation where the interpreter informed her that the notetaker was frequently on their phone. Siobhán, unaware of this, confronted the notetaker during a break and felt "happy" the interpreter had shared that information. Similarly, Ivy said she had to "fill in those gaps" for some students and reflected on the ethical dilemma of stepping outside the interpreter's "circumscribed role".

You will meet students for whom if you do not go the extra mile, you know there is no-one else out there to fill in those gaps, no-one, and so then it is up to yourself. I suppose it is a moral with an ethical question do I go the extra mile, do I help, am I crossing over and just helping. Sometimes helping is the right thing to do.

Ingrid, a new interpreter with only three to four months of experience, described being approached by a lecturer asking about a student's progress and their exams. At the start of the interview, Ingrid said she was "confused" about whether she was an interpreter or an advocate, and reiterated this at the end:

Am I the student's advocate, am I the interpreter, am I also their scribe, their note taker, what am I? Actually, knowing what your role is. You asked me at the beginning what my role is as an interpreter, I actually do not know, and I actually think that is a challenge in education because so many people expect different things from you.

Interpreters consistently reported spending considerable time clarifying their role to both lecturers and deaf students. This is further examined in Section 4.6.1.

4.3.3 The Role of the Lecturer

Deaf students were asked what they believed the lecturer's role was in the classroom, while interpreters were asked about the lecturer's role in the broader relationship. Most

students described the lecturer's role was to teach and emphasised accessibility and inclusivity. Sinéad believed it was important to make sure all students felt included in the class. Seán and Sorcha said the lecturer's role was to ensure clarity and understanding, to "make something very difficult, simple". Sabrina noted that while lecturers are responsible for delivering content and motivating students, they should also be "aware of what is going on in the classroom". When asked to elaborate, she explained that many lecturers "simply came in to deliver their lectures and left," unaware of issues among students. This view was echoed by Simon and Sophie, who attributed it to the large class sizes. Simon mentioned there "was a class joke going around that some lecturers just saw it as a job, present the information and then leave." Sophie said that in "a perfect, dream world," lecturers would know how to make everything accessible so she could attend class "without worrying about anything". Having different lecturers every semester, up to 10 in a year, she acknowledged it was "unrealistic to expect each of them to know how to work with a deaf student".

Interpreters shared similar views, particularly around inclusion and preparation. Isla said part of the lecturer's role is to "encourage" participation, give everyone opportunities, and "make sure everyone is at an equal field". Imogen felt lecturers should get to know their students, especially those whose first language is not English. She recalled lecturers greeting French students with "bonjour" but noted "nothing like that with deaf students", suggesting a similar gesture could help students "feel more comfortable and welcome". Iris emphasised the importance of lecturers communicating with support services, to "know what professionals are in the room", and to consider both the physical setup and delivery style of their classroom. Ivy stated that there "needs to be a realisation" by lecturers that interpreters are "coworker[s]", distinct from other supports such as notetakers. Once this is understood, she said, "partnership and cooperation" can develop, with regular check-ins on pace, terminology, and materials.

Ingrid shared a positive experience working as an in-house interpreter for a co-enrolled group, where lecturers understood that "preparation was part of their role". In this setting, lecturers took responsibility for informing interpreters about what needed to be translated and made accessible, contrasting with her experience supporting a single deaf student, where lecturers "were not as aware". Isabelle believed lecturers should meet directly with deaf students to discuss their needs, rather than approaching the interpreters. She also felt lecturers should understand how to support interpreters and be "more flexible with certain things and trusting of interpreters".

4.3.4 Relationships

Participants shared their expectations for effective working relationships among the three key stakeholders. Analysis of the data revealed that the most frequently cited interactions reported by participants during the interviews, occurred between interpreters and students, or between interpreters and lecturers. In contrast, cited interactions between students and lecturers, as well as triadic interactions were less prevalent.

Overall, participants' expectations centred on understanding each stakeholder's role, fostering comfort, maintaining open communication and collaboration, showing respect, and demonstrating flexibility. Students emphasised the importance of long-term engagement with interpreters to build confidence and support a student-centred approach. Reflecting on nine years of study, Sophie noted that "it can only happen if interpreters and lecturers work together... without placing the burden on deaf students". Sorcha also highlighted the value of collaboration between lecturers and interpreters. Sabrina explained a strong relationship means she "would be able to ask questions without feeling uncomfortable" and fully engage in learning. Sinéad described a positive experience where her lecturer "maintained eye-contact... rather than with the interpreter", which made her feel valued and empowered. Similarly, Seán stressed that "respect" among all three stakeholders was essential.

Interpreters consistently highlighted the importance of open communication and a shared understanding of roles. Isla, Ivy, and Isabelle described how proactive communication and open-minded lecturers contributed to smoother collaboration. However, Isla noted true triadic relationships were rare, explaining that "it's normally my relationship with the lecturer... and my relationship with students". Ian spoke highly of a lecturer who showed "kindness" and was "respectful" toward a group of co-enrolled deaf students, treating "them like they were their peers", which supported stronger relationships. Imogen reflected on the importance of cultural awareness and mutual respect, noting that when all three work well together, "you can't feel or sense the segregation".

Most lecturers reflected on the importance of collaboration and communication. Laura described a "positive relationship" with interpreters and stressed the need for openness, so that "whoever the interpreters were or whoever the students were... wouldn't be afraid to ask me a question". Lucy noted that interpreters should feel comfortable seeking clarification to avoid miscommunication. Lily and Lorraine observed students and interpreters had often already developed a strong relationship by the time they encountered them. Lily described it as "a well-oiled machine" but still emphasised the importance of "transparency" and "honest

engagement”. Luke echoed the need for openness and feedback, noting trust takes time to build and that keeping everyone “in the loop” is essential. In contrast, Liam admitted that he did not initially view the interpreter as a “partner”, explaining, “I would have thought about the relationship between me and the student, and the interpreter would have been nearly outside of that... doing that job that made the material accessible”.

Many participants discussed the importance of interpreter familiarity and consistency in building effective relationships. Six students expressed trust and comfort when working with regular interpreters. Sabrina highlighted the stark contrast between having a consistent team of four interpreters at her second university and the lack of continuity at her first. Siobhán preferred to choose her own interpreters and emphasised the importance of consistency, particularly as she progressed from a Level 7 (ordinary bachelor’s degree) to a Level 8 (honours bachelor’s degree) qualification. Seán described his experience:

My experience was very, very positive so far. But, except for those cases where my regular interpreters are not available, then I would have stiff, awkward, not translating – so that would be the only bad thing. And that gives me a lot of stress, I’m like, I need, need, need regular interpreters.

Four lecturers discussed the value of working with regular interpreters. Lorraine and Liam observed that familiarity contributed to positive relationships between students and interpreters. Luke noted regular interpreters “can definitely assist in having a working relationship that... tends to run more smoothly”. Lily reflected on how consistency also strengthened her own relationship with interpreters:

Having consistency in the interpreting team also means that you can build up a relationship with them and you know who they are, and you know their name, and you also know that you don’t need to be worried about what’s going on in the workshop or in the lecture, that you can kind of trust them.

While many valued interpreter familiarity, some raised concerns about blurred boundaries. Sophie and Seán described long-term interpreter relationships evolving into friendships, which they viewed positively. However, Sorcha preferred to maintain boundaries: “because it’s such a small pool of interpreters, if I become their friend, then I can’t ask them to

interpret for me...”. Imogen noted that shared language often leads interpreters and students to “get to know each other more than they would working in non-educational settings.” Luke was cautious as “it can sometimes appear more like a friendship rather than, kind of, a working relationship”.

Half of the interpreters expressed concern about student dependency, noting that students can become overly reliant on them for support that goes beyond interpreting. Lorraine echoed this concern, observing that her student “relied a lot on their interpreter and their notetaker, both were very good to them... but they [the student] probably let them do a lot of the communicating for them, even by email.” Isabelle warned that limited exposure to different interpreters could leave students unprepared for future settings: “if they move on from education and... they only have ever worked with three interpreters, I don’t think that serves them well”. Conversely, Ivy noted that in classes with a full group of deaf students, the lecturers become dependent, leaning on the interpreter for validation and as a “source of support”.

4.4 Classroom Environment

Another key theme was the complex interplay of classroom dynamics such as positioning, teaching styles, and collaborative learning, which participants identified as significantly influencing both teaching practices and student learning.

4.4.1 Physical Space and Positioning

Almost all participants discussed factors related to class size, physical layout, and interpreter positioning. Four students reported being the only deaf person in classes ranging from 300 to 600 students. Student described negotiating interpreter placement during class to ensure visibility and comfort. Seán shared the challenges of positioning in practical classes:

In practical lab work, it’s a very big room and you have three or four benches, and the lecturer could be over there **points far away**. So, they would have to walk and basically follow the lecturer, and the interpreter would always, make sure they always discussed and asked me, ‘Are you OK? Can you see me? Can you see me? If not, we can move’.

Many interpreters also spoke about navigating classroom spaces. Isabelle described having to “learn the spaces” with each new course or academic year, noting that “some rooms

are really cramped, some rooms are really tiny, some have really terrible lights” and having to “deal with stuff like fire drills going off in the middle of the day”. Lorraine echoed the challenges of small classrooms, where sometimes the interpreter would be “in front of the screen, or in front of something I was working on, and would have to move”.

Isla, Issac, and Imogen typically asked the students about their preferred interpreter positioning. Isla explained that she reassured students they did not need to sit at the front: “it’s something that deaf people feel, they have to sit at front”. Issac described a student who felt self-conscious about standing out because they already had a notetaker. The student preferred Issac to move around with the lecturer during practical work, and if they chose to look up, they could see Issac signing feedback to other students and passively take in this information.

And it really worked. It really, really and the deaf student just felt like ‘*Do you know what I can look if I want to look, if I’m focused on what I’m doing, I don’t have to look*’, in the same way all the other students could switch on and switch off, do you know what I mean?

Ian felt that sometimes “deaf people feel a burden to watch us [interpreters]” and described “crossing boundaries a little bit” by telling students they could look away or type if needed, acknowledging that watching interpretation all day can be “cognitively demanding”. Sophie echoed this, saying she would get “really tired” and did not realise she needed “eye-breaks”. Similarly, Simon said he felt a sense of “obligation, where I have to look at the interpreter all the time and make eye-contact”, which created “more pressure” compared to classes without an interpreter.

4.4.2 Lecturers’ Teaching Styles

Lecturers with experience teaching co-enrolled groups of deaf students frequently discussed adapting their materials. Laura, Lucy, and Luke were particularly mindful of using auditory-based resources. Laura noted the biggest difference was ensuring video and audio materials were accessible. Before the academic year, she was asked to provide materials for translation into ISL by the in-house interpreting team or to have captions added. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Laura prerecorded lectures and collaborated with the interpreting team for translation:

When COVID hit, sure everything had to be prerecorded and asynchronous so yeah, I'd link in with the interpreting team. They were phenomenal. Like, there was an awful lot of invisible work they did that wasn't in a lecture. In fact, a huge amount of interpreting of video material and they were really efficient, responsive, helpful.

Luke emphasised designing materials to be accessible from the outset, including captioned videos, increased use of visuals, and enabling PowerPoint subtitles. He referred to UDL principles, stating he did not "tailor it for a specific student in mind, I try to do it so that it's accessible to everybody, as much as possible". Lucy provided online lecture recordings but found it challenging to include interpreters in these recordings. However, Lucy expressed concern about deaf students expecting written pre-class materials to be interpreted into ISL, preferring instead that they read the texts themselves. Lily aimed to provide relevant and relatable materials for deaf students, such as activities and optional readings focused on deafness. These resources were offered to all students. She described adapting specific activities:

I suppose in terms of changes, maybe for certain activities I would have tried to see was there an ISL equivalent. So, for example, we would, one of the things we looked at was reading fluency, and for hearing students who are reading aloud, there's certain measures we can use to see how quickly they read, how expressive their reading is, and I managed to find like a signed version of that same rubric that had been published, so I was able to give that as an option.

Some interpreters highlighted issues with inaccessible materials, particularly with videos. Ivy observed an increased use of videos with "very fast-paced speech track," and noted that lecturers often assumed auto-generated subtitles were sufficient. Isabelle routinely checked with lecturers to ensure subtitles were present. Ingrid described a lack of awareness among lecturers working with a single deaf student, compared to those teaching co-enrolled groups:

When I was working with a single student, they are really not aware. When there are clips up, I would interpret them, of course, but I find some students prefer, they find it

really distracting going between the interpreter [and the video clips] and so they would prefer to have the subtitles, and there was never any subtitles on the clips. They were not as aware as the other group that I worked with.

Many participants described additional accommodations made by lecturers. Luke typically emailed students in advance to ask about accommodation needs. Lorraine, who was completing a UDL Digital Badge course at the time of teaching a single deaf student, attributed her continued interest in UDL to that experience. She implemented changes such as offering alternative assessment formats, using a round pointer for slides which was “much more effective for them [deaf student] in following the notes... or if we were doing examples on the board”, and adjusting her classroom movement to remain visible to the student and interpreter. Laura also minimised her movement after consulting with interpreters, though she felt there was a “balance” needed to ensure effective classroom management of other students. Lily, who typically taught from the back of the room, moved to the front to maintain a “line of sight” with deaf students and interpreters. She was also mindful of lengthy terminology that interpreters would need to fingerspell:

I make a point of standing at the slide so that the interpreters are within my sight, but that I’m also standing at the slide and pointing at the word that I’m referring to so that they can read it rather than necessarily having to have the whole thing fingerspelled out because I imagine, I don’t know, I’ve never been reliant on fingerspelling for interpretation, but I imagine that sometimes it’s easier just to see the word.

Lily and Liam made a deliberate effort to reduce their speaking pace to support interpretation. However, many interpreters and students noted that lecturers often spoke too quickly, negatively affecting interpretation quality. Isla requested two interpreters for one class due to a lecturer “speaking very fast, it was obviously affecting the quality of the interpretation, because I was so tired after 15 minutes of interpreting”. Imogen recalled feeling “bombarding [sic] with words” and struggled to keep up. Some deaf students also noticed when interpreters had difficulty keeping pace. Sophie believed it was the interpreter’s responsibility to manage such situations and felt “discriminated against” when interpreters stopped signing or skipped information due to lecturers speaking too fast. Sorcha when praising one lecturer, felt they kept

a good pace and were clear, “not compared to other lecturers where often it felt rushed and overwhelming”. Simon echoed this sentiment:

Lecturers often walked around the classroom, and just pointed to the board, not make any eye-contact and talking very fast, all that kind of stuff. For me, it was really difficult to look at two places at once trying to look at interpreter and the slides – it was just a lot for me! They needed to slow down so I could take the time to look at everything. ... Maybe it wasn't the lecturer, maybe it was the system's fault, because there was only 40 minutes, and they needed to get through the class quickly so maybe they didn't have time to slow down.

Interpreters and students also discussed lecturers' attitudes and awareness regarding including deaf students in the classroom. Sophie compared her undergraduate and postgraduate experiences, noting that postgraduate lecturers were more open to change, “looking at alternative ways of doing things,” and made themselves available to students. This openness made her “feel comfortable enough” to meet with lecturers, which increased her classroom engagement. Sabrina shared a similar experience, recalling a lecturer who asked deaf students to stay after class to discuss how best to support their learning. She described this as a stark contrast to her previous university, where lecturers were “cold.” Sinéad praised one lecturer who “adopted a person-centric approach,” allowing her to “take the lead” in conversations with interpreters. She described this as “such a positive experience.” In contrast, Siobhán felt most lecturers lacked deaf awareness and recalled an incident where a lecturer refused to repeat themselves after an interpreter requested clarification.

Interpreters shared a mixture of views. They felt some lecturers were inquisitive and eager to learn how to make their classrooms more inclusive, while others were described as reluctant and “territorial”. Ivy shared she typically provided guidance to lecturers before class, but responses varied:

I generally find if someone replies fairly quickly, that is a good sign that they are interested in the process. That they recognise they are working with someone else. You have other people that do not respond at all, and then there is people that do not

respond plus the fact that they are very very rude and territorial. Just in ways that are very very difficult to deal with.

Ian described the initial conversation with lecturers as “a very fine line to thread,” noting that it could be perceived as an “invasion of somebody’s space and people do get territorial [saying] *‘and this is my classroom, this is how I teach’*”. However, Ian also shared a positive experience with a lecturer who went “above and beyond” and showed “kindness” toward the co-enrolled group, offering to review material with them as needed. Imogen recalled a similar experience, describing a lecturer who took time to “get to know [the] student,” which she felt led to greater student engagement. She believed lecturers could do more to connect with deaf students, such as acknowledging and appreciating their language. Lily learned some classroom management phrases in ISL for her co-enrolled group and felt this effort was “noticed” by them.

When asked whether lecturers changed their teaching style in response to having more than one deaf student in the classroom, most lecturers said they did not. Deaf students were generally unsure, suggesting it would depend on the lecturer’s attitude, personality, deaf awareness, and the number of deaf students in the class. Interpreter responses were mixed.

One interpreter felt there was no difference in teaching styles between classes with a single deaf student and those with a co-enrolled group. Others believed that having more than one deaf student increased “visibility” and made lecturers more “conscious,” though some lecturers might “fall back into... their own style” or become “more passive” as the lecturer is “no longer worried about inclusion, because they have each other”. However, three interpreters with experience working with a full group of deaf students agreed that lecturers had to be more “flexible”, “adjust their teaching methods”, and “change their approach” due to the “very very different dynamic.” Ivy elaborated:

So, straight away I think a lot of hearing lecturers, trainers, teachers will notice that difference and they will have to change their style to adopt to it just in the classroom. ... So, I think in those situations they are out of their comfort zone, and it probably means they are easier to work with because they are more aware of the need to do things differently, but if it is just the one deaf student and everyone else is hearing, there is not anything like the same pressure.

4.4.3 Collaborative Learning

Sinéad described how her classes were discussion-based and typically arranged in a large semi-circle. In one module, the lecturer noticed Sinéad “struggling to contribute” and restructured the class into smaller groups of four with a nominated spokesperson to present to the wider class. Sinéad felt this format “helped with building relationships with other students and the lecturer.” The lecturer decided to retain the new format going forward, regardless of whether a deaf student was present. When Sinéad suggested this approach to other lecturers, responses were mixed, some adopted the change, while others did not. Seán felt included during classroom group work when interpreters were present. Interpreters would interject and ask students to repeat themselves when needed. In contrast, he described feeling excluded during group work without interpreter support:

That’s another anxiety as well, like having to do, you’re the only deaf working in a group of young people who may not understand you. And sometimes you get that, ‘It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter, we will do this’ you know?

Several interpreters discussed the challenges of managing group discussions and turn-taking. Ivy shared that in large classrooms, deaf students seated at the front often missed discussions happening behind them. She noted that deaf students were “not so much interested in the details of exactly what has been said, they just want to know *who* [emphasis added by participant] is saying them”. Ivy would describe the person’s appearance alongside interpreting their words and then the deaf student would look away to see who it was. Meanwhile, the discussion would continue, and Ivy would try to “remember it all” for when the student reverts to them. Ivy acknowledged there was a loss of information when this happens and felt “dissatisfied” that she could not provide complete access to the discourse.

Iris emphasised the need to be a “very present interpreter” during group discussions, using verbal filler words to indicate the deaf student is agreeing or formulating a response while simultaneously interpreting the ongoing discussion. Isabelle echoed this, describing moments where she felt like the “grown-up, scolding the kids going like ‘*speak up now*’ or like ‘*stop talking at the same time*’”. She found interpreting group work helpful for her own understanding of course content and said it helped her to “adjust” her interpreting style. Issac noted that online group work was easier to manage than in-person settings:

But in-person groups can be really good fun, but it has to come at a sacrifice of you're not going to get everything. So, if you want me to get everything, then I am going to have to be more than just the interpreter in the corner. I'm going to have to start going, 'Sorry can we talk one at a time?', 'Can you repeat what you said?' kind of thing?

Sorcha and Sabrina, part of a co-enrolled group on a mainstream course, shared experiences of collaborative learning. Sorcha noted that as hearing students could sign, the interpreter took a passive role, occasionally checking in to offer support. Sabrina recalled that lecturers would sometimes inform the interpreters in advance if deaf students were to be split into separate groups, ensuring there were "enough interpreters to cover the class". Ingrid and Ian also reflected on their experience with co-enrolled groups. Ingrid said deaf students typically stayed together, though occasionally they were placed in separate groups, requiring the interpreters to split up. Ian added deaf students were "mostly put in the same group together, they wanted to be... because it is the same language and there is a culture understanding".

Lily echoed Ian's observation, noting that deaf students often chose to work together to "focus on the deaf context" in their projects. However, she observed that their consistent seating arrangement, at the same table for better sightlines to interpreters, may have unintentionally led to hearing students opting to sit elsewhere. Lily reflected, "in retrospect, it might have been helpful if I was more proactive in encouraging that [mixing groups]". Luke shared that some deaf students preferred working with hearing peers to build broader connections. He believed this also helped hearing students become more familiar with interpreters and develop deaf awareness. However, Luke acknowledged that with only one interpreter available, it was not always feasible to split deaf students into different groups. Interpreter Isla echoed this, noting that limited interpreter availability "restricted their [deaf students] opportunity to work with other hearing students". Laura observed an "interesting dynamic" when deaf students were the majority in a mixed deaf and hearing group:

Some of the deaf students were leading the discussion. They were the ones who were, you know, raising questions, having kind of, a reflective discussion. ... I think probably the numbers for that reason was helpful that there wasn't just one for each other's

sake. ... so, they had somebody else to bounce off who understood perhaps the challenges they were facing.

Iris shared a similar sentiment, stating that when deaf students outnumbered hearing students, “the culture of deaf communication dominates and straight away then it makes for obviously a better experience for the deaf participants”. Iris also interpreted for a full group of deaf students, as did Ivy. In these cases, interpreters typically translated from ISL to English for a hearing lecturer. Iris described the experience as “totally different and actually wonderful to watch”, noting it required “less work” and was simpler to manage. However, Ivy offered a contrasting view, emphasising that even with two interpreters, information could still be missed:

For the deaf group and hearing lecturer, I often felt that the difficulty was getting across the full depth of the conversation in the class to the lecturer and quite often the discussion would be just so free flowing. If it touched upon anything that was near and dear to deaf people’s lives or communication or oppression, then within two seconds you would have such a fast-flowing discussion.

4.4.4 Motivation and Participation

Participants were asked to share their perspectives on deaf students’ motivation and participation in the classroom, and whether differences existed between single deaf students and co-enrolled groups. Among the six students who were the only deaf individuals in their classes, most reported limited participation, often linked to confidence levels and situational factors. Sophie avoided asking questions during her undergraduate studies, fearing they would be “inappropriate or stupid” and that lecturers might perceive her as “stupid or thick because I was deaf.” Her confidence grew during postgraduate and professional studies, which she attributed to lecturers being approachable and using incentives to encourage participation:

The lecturer... brought in Haribo sweets as an incentive for our participation. ... I was one of the remaining students who hadn’t responded, and the lecturer seemed to avoid looking at me, probably because the interpreter was present. That’s when I decided to be more assertive and put my hand up, ... After that moment, it became somewhat

easier for me to participate like the other students without feeling self-conscious. ...

This is an example of how a lecturer's positive attitude can make a difference.

Simon and Seán also reported discomfort with asking questions, while Sorcha linked her hesitation to anxiety around public speaking. During Sabrina's first HE experience as a single deaf student, she had "no confidence", felt "miserable" and was "afraid to ask questions" due to a lack of connection with lecturers:

No, those four years at first university were hell if I can be honest. Yes, I did enjoy the course itself, but I experienced isolation a lot and that was a big factor for killing the motivation for learning. I had to force myself to study the best I can even though there was loneliness. The experience was still awful compared to here [second university] which is like paradise, like going from zero to a hundred. **laughing**

For Sinéad, confidence was not an issue, but she noted participation was context-dependent. She often had to "judge the situation" before raising her hand and felt interpreters were sometimes hesitant to interrupt discussions to signal her intent to ask questions or contribute. She would "urge the interpreter to speak up immediately," but was occasionally told to wait. In some cases, when interpreters did relay her question, the lecturer had already moved on, making her feel "awkward" and less inclined to participate. However, she described one positive experience:

However, there was one lecturer... and they were wonderful. They would notice me, stop immediately and look at me directly, providing me with a great opportunity to say what I wanted to say. That made me more actively involved in that class compared to other modules.

All interpreters had experience of working with a single deaf student and noted that participation varied depending on the student's confidence, maturity, year of study, and who the interpreter was. Ian observed they often avoided participation to prevent being seen in a "certain light", such as giving "wrong answers" or asking "silly questions". Iris noted that while most did not actively participate, some did and felt it "normalise the presence of the

interpreter” for hearing students. Issac emphasised the importance of voiceover skills, explaining that students needed to “trust that the interpreter is going to nail that voiceover”:

So, it does tend to shift and change but I think it very much, like, I don’t know how many 18, 19-year-olds are confident to put up their hand anyway and then put them in a scenario where they’re the only deaf person and have an interpreter in front of them that they don’t really know. And depending on that interpreter to do their voiceover, and that’s not criticising interpreters either it’s a fact, it’s our job. You know?

Four lecturers with experience teaching single deaf students also cited confidence and personality as key factors influencing participation. Most believed that having more than one deaf student in the class could offer peer support. Lorraine referred to the benefit of “volume in numbers” and the value of “knowing that somebody is in the same situation”. Similarly, Liam felt it would have been “easier” if there was more than one deaf student as “it costs less to assert yourself maybe, if you have a bit of support and an ally”.

Laura and Lily, who taught a co-enrolled group on a mainstream course, described their groups as “highly engaged” and “more than willing to ask a question”. Lily elaborated that deaf students often “participate[d] more than the students who weren’t using the interpreters”. Both described their groups as “intact” and united by a sense of “commonality” in supporting one another. Lucy, who taught a full group of deaf students, described the group as a “fantastic support for each other and there was a definite sense that they were, I was going to say something like, in charge”.

Interpreters with experience in co-enrolled settings echoed these views. They observed deaf students working and chatting together, “supporting each other,” and “checking things out amongst themselves.” Issac and Ian noted a strong sense of “rapport” among deaf students. Iris emphasised the impact of peer support:

Yes, and not even just you know double the amount, I’d say exponentially, straight away if you’ve two deaf people straight away there’s a great support of, ‘*Did you get that?*’, ‘*Did you get that?*’, ‘*I was going to ask a question*’, ‘*go on, go on, go on*’. You know? So, straight away there’s that support. So, way more participation in the class. Especially three or four of them, you know.

However, Issac and Isabelle cautioned that deaf students in co-enrolled groups could risk being “lumped together” or not “making an effort to get to know anyone else in the class”. Ivy observed that with a full group of deaf students, “a big thing is just the rate at which deaf groups ask questions. ... sometimes before the question is fully formed”.

The three deaf students who had experience as part of a co-enrolled group all reported confidence in asking questions and participating in class. Sorcha felt her participation was influenced by her personality and the fact that hearing students in her class could sign. Sabrina felt by having a relationship with lecturers, this made her feel comfortable to participate. Sinéad, referring to a fully deaf student group, observed that lecturers “always seemed to struggle with how to manage multiple deaf students in the class and seeing many raised hands”. Sinéad elaborated:

Sinéad: Oh, in those classes I raised my hand so often, no problem! *laughing*

Caroline: *laughing* Why do you think that was different?

Sinéad: Because it was a class for deaf students! *laughing*.

4.5 Intricacies of Educational Interpreting

Another prominent theme identified in the data was the multifaceted domain of educational interpreting such as cognitive processing, subject-specific vocabulary, preparation, subject knowledge, and limitations.

4.5.1 Deaf Students’ Cognitive Load and Comprehension

Many deaf students, alongside some interpreters and lecturers discussed variables influencing deaf students’ cognitive load and comprehension. These included subject matter, terminology, visual fatigue, and individual interpreter signing styles.

Sophie and Simon previously described the difficulties in understanding numerically based content through interpreters, preferring captioning as an alternative support. Sophie recalled that when she first started college, she “got so overwhelmed, it was information overload” and experienced eye fatigue from watching the interpreter. Simon found it challenging to comprehend mathematical formulas while simultaneously reading and taking notes:

For example, my course had a heavy maths element, and you needed to read the content to try and understand the formulas but how is that going to be interpreted into ISL? You really needed to focus on the written content. So having to watch the interpreter, read the content and write down information all at the same time, was overwhelming! So, a lot of the time I just sat back and watched.

Siobhán described a class where she sat in front of four computer screens, each displaying a different programming language. She struggled to follow the lecturer's instructions due to interpretation lag time. She also expressed frustration when interpreters stopped interpreting and instead directed her to look at PowerPoint slides without specifying where to focus. Several students noted that interpreters were unfamiliar with course-specific terminology, which negatively impacted their learning. Sinéad appreciated interpreters' efforts to translate academic terms into ISL but emphasised the importance using precise terminology:

For example, with a word like 'individualisation' or 'individualism' - the interpreter was signing it like, 'the world becomes individual, before community, now individual'. After a lecturer gave me feedback on my assignment and said I need to be using specific terms more often, and it was then I realised the interpreters were interpreting the word 'individualism' without giving the actual term or word first. I struggled a lot with this.

Sabrina shared that interpreters occasionally asked her to explain terminology she herself did not understand. She said her learning was "affected" and "impacted" when replacement interpreters or student interpreters were used. She described one replacement interpreter as "stiff", frequently clarifying technical terms with the lecturer during class, and noted that the student interpreter appeared nervous, which led her to miss "valuable information from the lecture".

Seán and Simon also observed significant differences in their comprehension depending on the interpreter's signing style. Seán felt he understood one interpreter better, describing them as "relaxed", while "the other one was stiff, and I didn't understand anything. And I think that's because they were very nervous to do science interpreting". Simon similarly noted: "one of them was really good at being very emotive... changing their signing style... and

made it really interesting, whereas, the other interpreter just signed without emotion, and it was so boring”. Sorcha shared that interpreters often signed “close to their chest”, without using role-shift or spatial referencing, which made her disengage. She recalled one interpreter whose style made her feel “like falling asleep”. When she raised this with the interpreter, they attributed it to the lecturer’s monotone voice. However, Sorcha had “doubts”, noting that other hearing students were actively engaged and taking notes.

Half of interpreters observed that deaf students encountered challenges with English language comprehension. Iris, as mentioned earlier, noted many interpreters support students with written English, describing it as “a real challenge that needs to be highlighted”. Ivy worked with students who were “almost unwilling to engage with English text at all” and would point to passages for the interpreter to explain. She felt uncomfortable doing this, especially when the text related to an exercise the student had to complete: Ivy explained: “signing that [points piece of text] to ISL, to someone who is only looking at your ISL, and not the text, is skewing it”. Imogen highlighted the frequent use of fingerspelling within educational interpreting, explaining that students still need access to “jargon” alongside the visual explanations to ensure a “full kind of understanding”. Ian shared a similar sentiment below:

Other people will struggle with the English sometimes. The interpreters will struggle with *‘How do I make this visual enough for you? How do I make this palatable enough for you?’*, because while you have to be visual and you have to explain the concepts but also, they are going to need those English concepts for exams and for assessments.

Laura described moments when interpreters were unsure how to interpret specific words, saying, “there were a couple of times you could see when somebody [interpreters] didn’t know how to interpret a word, and it was important to keep an eye out for that”. She also noted “confusion between the students and the interpreters” when this occurred. Lily emphasised that interpreters should not try to “reform a poor explanation” by “enhancing or augmenting” the lecturer’s message. She also stressed the importance of ensuring “technical jargon or terminology doesn’t become a stumbling block for the students who are reliant on the interpreter, when it might not have been a stumbling block for the other students”.

4.5.2 Subject-Specific Vocabulary and Lexical Development

All deaf students reported challenges with subject-specific vocabulary. One common issue was interpreters using signs that were incorrect or contextually inappropriate. Sorcha expressed frustration when interpreters used incorrect signs. For example, using the sign for *act* in a theatrical sense rather than the legal sense. She felt she often had to “put up them with doing the wrong signs” and would have preferred to meet with interpreters beforehand to agree on vocabulary. Sophie shared an experience with a last-minute replacement interpreter who used separate signs for *in* and *voice*, which she later realised referred to *invoice*. Although the context was incorrect, she appreciated the interpreter’s “commitment to not leaving anything out”. Sinéad described some interpreters as uncooperative, “insisting on using the signs they knew and sometimes said the signs were too graphic”. When asked to elaborate, she recalled asking an interpreter to use a visual sign for *self-harming* rather than signing *self* and *harm* separately. The interpreter refused, which made Sinéad feel disempowered: “while I understand that interpreters have their own views and beliefs, I asked them to sign it, so it’s important for them to remain neutral in their job”.

Another challenge was the lack of established ISL signs for course-specific terminology. Five deaf students either met or consulted with interpreters to agree or create signs. Sophie and Seán felt this helped to reduce the amount of fingerspelling, though Seán noted he would “miss some of the class because we’re trying to come up with signs”. He elaborated further below:

With STEM, there’s not really any signs yet. So every class, every minute that the lecturer spoke, there was another word, another word that is so long so you cannot spend all time fingerspelling... at that point in time, we just quickly, ‘OK, *what’s that word?*’ and then make up a sign for it, and then when that same word came up, we used the same sign going forward.

Siobhán, as previously mentioned, wrote down key terms and met with interpreters before class to “create” and “agree what signs to use”. She felt that consistent use of agreed ISL signs contributed to her academic success: “I continued to use the ISL we used, and I passed all my exams in the next three years which was a big relief”. Sabrina recalled meeting with the in-house interpreting team alongside other co-enrolled deaf students to discuss subject-specific vocabulary:

We, as a group, collectively created and provided the signs. For instance, during one lunchtime in the canteen, we compiled a list of words to try and avoid fingerspelling or skipping these words during the lectures and created signs for the interpreters to use.

All interpreters discussed similar challenges regarding subject-specific vocabulary. Isabelle described it as the biggest challenge in educational interpreting, especially in “very niche” courses like computer programming, where “the signs aren’t there”. Isla also found programming difficult to interpret, along with “language courses, which specifically relate to describing sounds”. Ian noted some courses were “very technical” and used “very specific language”. Isaac acknowledged the lack of ISL vocabulary but felt the issue was more pronounced in the past, particularly in certain subject areas. To address these challenges, Isla, and Ivy said they tried to meet with students beforehand to learn which specific signs were being used. Ian emphasised the importance of collaboration, stating that students should “work with the interpreter if they want certain vocabulary developed” or decide whether to use “shorthand”. Imogen also used shorthand strategies, initially spelling out the full word before introducing an abbreviation. Isabelle reflected on how creating signs for subject-specific vocabulary has influenced her ISL:

Sometimes now I’ll hear something, a term, and I’ll go back to using that sign that was created in that course, and I will kind of have to say to myself, *‘Oh that is not a standard sign, that is something that we established in that course’*.

Interpreters also emphasised the importance of consistency in ISL signs to reduce cognitive processing of signs. Isla said some students would tell her to “sign it in English or it in the signs you know... and I’ll be able to decode it”, acknowledging this placed “extra pressure” and “extra work” on the students. Isla, Ian, and Imogen said they made efforts to inform other interpreters working with the same deaf student about agreed signs to maintain consistency. Iris explained that when there is no agreement on which sign to use, giving *electricity* as an example, this can create “extra work” for the student. Ivy echoed this sentiment:

Even though a deaf person is well able to look at various signs for ‘database’. ... It is still a half a second of an effort of ‘What is that? Oh, that is database okay’. So, you want to

minimise that. You want to make sure that the vocabulary is shared. ... I often say to people, 'Look you do not need to use my sign but let us all use one sign'.

Four lecturers also demonstrated awareness of subject-specific vocabulary challenges. Laura was mindful to explain complex words, acronyms, or Irish terms that might be unfamiliar to interpreters. Liam noted that interpreters requested course materials to “get a sense” of the vocabulary. Similarly, Lily and Lorraine shared materials in advance, aware of the “technical” nature of the content. Lily elaborated:

There is, I suppose, particular terminology that might be hard to interpret on the fly... in my area, there would be technical terms that we, that we come across and there will be some aspects of the material that we look at, that might not be the easiest to interpret.

4.5.3 Interpreter Preparation and Knowledge Sharing

Almost all participants discussed aspects of interpreter preparation during the interviews. Some deaf students outlined the importance of lecturers sharing materials with interpreters in advance. For Sophie, this was essential “to ensure the interpreters can do their job effectively”. Sabrina noted that interpreters sometimes sought clarification from lecturers on materials they received, stressing that collaboration was key: “it’s important the lecturer works with the interpreter, giving them the terminology and words so the interpreter knows, as this can influence my learning”. Simon observed “different attitudes” by lecturers in sharing materials:

Some were really willing to engage with the interpreters, giving the preparation materials and notes but some of them weren’t so willing. Having preparation was really important for the interpreters to understand, but some lecturers just weren’t willing to give them. One of the interpreters did a lot of reading and preparation themselves to try and understand the subject as they didn’t come from that background, whereas the other interpreter already had a background in science, so they didn’t need any of that preparation.

All interpreters discussed lack of preparation materials and lecturers' reluctance to share them, noting the impact on their ability to provide effective interpreting. Imogen believed it was "very important to prep yourself to the highest level" and would share her email with lecturers, hoping "they are kind enough" to send materials. Isabelle and Iris agreed the lack of preparation materials was one of the biggest challenges in educational interpreting, with Iris citing it as a key factor affecting her performance. Ian stated that "effective interpreting is definitely getting prep, which is not always forthcoming". He described some educators being very forthcoming, whereas others viewed interpreters as a "nuisance" or an "invader on their space".

Ian described these lecturers as "quite stubborn... are not necessarily happy with you there and that creates further difficulties because then, when you are asking for things, you are seen as difficult". Issac echoed this, suggesting that when lecturers viewed interpreters as professionals, they were more likely to "respect" requests for materials. He stressed that interpreters "genuinely need [it] do their job right and therefore make your [the lecturer's] class more accessible". Ivy added, there was "no reason a PowerPoint cannot be given to an interpreter in advance. The interpreter has a code of ethics and a code of conduct". Isla also encountered resistance from some lecturers:

Some lecturers are very concerned, even if you explain to them about your code of ethics, you explain to them about confidentiality, that we don't distribute the material we receive, that we get rid of it straight away after the course is finished, you still feel that there is some reluctance from lecturers, to provide us with the information.

However, according to Ingrid and Iris, in HEIs which employed in-house interpreters, lecturers were more aware of the importance of preparation and were expected to provide materials in advance.

All lecturers in this study demonstrated awareness of the importance of sharing materials with interpreters in advance. Laura and Lily stated that interpreters were enrolled onto their HEI's virtual learning environment, giving them access to course materials. Laura felt this was essential, stating "they couldn't support them properly without getting the totality of what those students were trying to work with". Lily acknowledged that while "it wasn't always possible to do that [share materials] just because I'd often would be finishing a lecture myself

10 minutes before going in, but where possible, that sharing would have happened beforehand”.

Lucy, Liam, Lorraine, and Luke shared materials when requested. Luke felt “strongly about the interpreter preparing in advance for the class”. He elaborated:

I always get a bit concerned when interpreters don’t contact me and look for preparatory materials. ...I always spend time each year adapting, familiarising myself with the content and when interpreters don’t do formal preparation, even if they’re, they might feel that they, they’re comfortable with the topic or the module, it does concern me.

Across all stakeholder groups, interpreter background knowledge emerged as a key factor in effective interpreting. Deaf students Simon, Sabrina, Siobhán, and Seán emphasised the value of interpreters being familiar with the subject. Simon noted that one interpreter with a science background “was able to translate the information well and give a good interpretation, not just word for word like some interpreters would”. He acknowledged that while this was a “big ask... it’s especially needed for technical areas”.

Sabrina felt that even a “surface-level” understanding helped interpreters “explain it clearly, [which] is then relayed to me clearly”. Seán, who studied science, did not expect interpreters to hold degrees in the subject but valued “experience in interpreting for science” noting that some withdrew due to struggling with the material. Siobhán shared an experience with an interpreter who initially struggled:

An interpreter arrived into the classroom and said the course was really difficult for them and I felt like they weren’t giving me the full information of what was being said by the lecturer. After about two or four weeks, the interpreter improved knowing more about the subject as it became easier for them.

In contrast, Siobhán described another interpreter as being “very capable and had beautiful ISL even though they were a new graduate”. She suspected they were familiar with the topic and asked the interpreter, who confirmed they had some knowledge. Siobhán was “really impressed. ...they were able to understand my signs and the subject, and were able to interpret properly, it was a big relief for me!”.

Isla acknowledged it was not always possible to provide effective interpreting “because we’re not all fully familiar with the topics we’re interpreting”. She valued access to materials, even from previous years, as it gave some “background knowledge”. Ivy emphasised the need to prepare both with provided materials and through independent research, though she cautioned against over-preparing:

That was my mistake before. I would spend hours, and hours, and hours researching and researching that I do not get paid for. It is knowing the balance. How much preparation is going to leave me tired for tomorrow’s interpreting and how much is going to be just what I need.

Issac recalled interpreting for a science course and “openly told the deaf student I don’t know any of this stuff”, offering to step down. He continued working alongside a co-interpreter with a science background who was “able to educate me, to then help me prep to go into those classes”. Ian, referring to the visual nature of sign language emphasised “you have to know what everything looks like” and understand “where everything is in relation to everything else, for architecture, for science, for so many other things”. He described exploring the inside of a computer to better understand components like the motherboard. Imogen also alluded to challenges of interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary:

I believe it is very important for an interpreter to have understanding of the topic prior to interpreting. ... I find it pretty challenging sometimes because it is not talking about everyday life stuff like, ... they are very specific topics that you have to have this in-depth knowledge, not maybe in-depth, but just to have some knowledge. ... and if I don’t know what the word means how can I interpret it?

Lucy recalled working with two interpreters who had previously studied the course content and therefore had “very strong grasps of what we were talking about”. She felt this was particularly beneficial because the course was at postgraduate level with “some complicated concepts” noting it was very useful when “interpreters had some kind of sense of the terrain of the content”.

Interpreters described various ways they shared information with colleagues, whether working as co-interpreters or as part of a broader interpreting team. All had experience

interpreting both alone and with a co-interpreter. Since co-interpreters were not always available, their presence was highly valued. Interpreters highlighted the benefits of having “support”, receiving “clarification” for missed content, being prompted with “a feed of a sign or a word” and having the opportunity to “debrief” after the class.

When working solo, interpreters typically alternated days with two or three others supporting the same deaf student. Most emphasised the importance of having “some kind of communication channel”, as they might “never meet each other” or “never get an opportunity to see each other face to face”. WhatsApp was the primary tool used, with some also using email to discuss vocabulary, handovers, preparation, and scheduling. Isla and Ian, for example, discussed content covered, delays encountered, and specific PowerPoint slides reviewed. Interpreters also shared new ISL signs developed with the student and sought clarification from colleagues.

Issac described himself as a “handover interpreter” and “hate[d] the idea of someone going into something blindsided”, though he acknowledged that some interpreters have “no interest in it”. Isabelle also valued sharing relevant information with new or substitute interpreters, including “any specific need for the deaf student” or logistical details such as “where the classrooms are, that class takes part outside for half the day”. However, like Issac, she noted that: “sometimes the other interpreter isn’t interested in talking to you, so it doesn’t go anywhere”.

Some interpreters raised concerns about confidentiality when sharing information. Iris, referring to WhatsApp, stressed the need to be “really mindful” of what is shared. Isaac noted that ethical concerns can create hesitation:

I think as well, the higher up within education you go, the more severe an impact that’s there if you’re not communicating with each other. We are a team, and you know there’s been lots of struggles for years around confidentiality ..., we’re under an umbrella of the fact that it’s the same deaf client and it’s the same scenario. ... But a lot of interpreters really struggle with the concept of ethics. A code of ethics is not a list of strict, stringent rules; it’s guidelines for behaviours.

Imogen shared this apprehension, recalling that “after graduating, I was so paranoid about confidentiality”. Therefore, she avoided seeking advice or sharing information during her

first year of practice, something she later regretted, calling it “not a good idea”. Similarly, Ingrid, who had recently qualified, reflected on her experience interpreting for a single deaf student:

I was only a month or two months out, I did not know what was best. Looking back, it is definitely something I should have done. I do not think I ever actually contacted that other interpreter. I knew the interpreter’s name, I am sure they knew my name from the agency and through emails. But definitely looking back, it is something I should have done. For the sake of that student as well, because the student liked how I did things and the same vice versa, so we should have communicated our strategies and like that it was the same and there was consistency.

4.5.4 Managing Classroom Interactions

Some interpreters discussed challenges related to managing classroom interactions, particularly when interjecting during lectures for clarification or to facilitate deaf student participation. Isla felt it was important not to be “intrusive” or “asking the lecturer to repeat a lot of the time” as this made the interpreter “very visible”. She found it “less intrusive” when a co-interpreter was present, as they could assist with missed information or suggest signs. Iris noted the need to make a “judgement call” about interjecting, as deaf students may feel “very embarrassed by, you know, interrupting the whole class”. Imogen agreed, describing interjections as “tricky”, especially when some students preferred not to be put in the “spotlight” or “in an awkward position... that everybody will be looking at them”. Ian, however, stressed the importance of acting quickly when a deaf student raised their hand to contribute. Ivy observed “newer interpreters” often lacked confidence in knowing how to signal:

They are very, very unconfident to do that, but I think it needs to be taught as well. This is not about your confidence, it is about that student’s participation, and you might feel awkward about saying something but if you do not, they suffer. So that is something I think that, even though I am very sympathetic and supportive of new interpreters going into the college, I do feel to a certain extent from day one there is elements of that that you have to get over because it is not about you.

Deaf students Sophie and Sinéad also shared their experiences of interpreters being reluctant to interject. Sophie felt that frequent interactions could make lecturers perceive interpreters as “difficult” which in turn made things “awkward” for her. She recalled one interpreter who struggled to keep up with the lecturer and chose not to interject, instead telling her, “this part would be too hard for you” and continued trying to interpret. Sophie concluded, “it was clear to me that the interpreter can’t do their job well”. As previously noted in Section 4.4.4, Sinéad observed that many interpreters were uncomfortable with interjecting and emphasised that effective interpreting is when “interpreters are confident and interrupt the class if needed to manage the situation”.

Lecturers Lorraine and Laura reported that the interpreters in their classes were confident in seeking clarification, with Laura noting that some did so after class. Lucy highlighted the importance of interpreters feeling comfortable enough to interject:

I think it was always useful that if the interpreter did not understand a concept that they felt that it was not an imposition to say, *‘Wait a second, will you explain that to me because I cannot translate that if I don’t know’*. ... So, it is kind of second best to having subject knowledge, to at least have an open relationship, where the interpreter is not feeling shy about asking for clarification and they know that they are not giving a mistaken impression of what you are talking about.

4.5.5 Constraints and Limitations in Interpreting

Most deaf students noted disparities in interpreters’ skillset and experience levels, suggesting a need for greater self-reflection among interpreters regarding their suitability for educational interpreting. Simon, Siobhán, and Seán frequently compared interpreters, noting that those with subject familiarity and engaging signing styles were more effective than those without. Siobhán recalled a replacement interpreter frequently interjecting their co-interpreter, who was a regular team member, adding more detail and leaving her “shocked” and questioning the regular interpreter’s ability.

Sinéad believed “some interpreters were better suited for certain modules,” based on their ability to adapt their style. She described an incident where she corrected an interpreter mid-class for not voicing her question accurately. The “interpreter got upset and walked out of the class”, which was subsequently cancelled by the lecturer. Sinéad texted the interpreter to

meet up to discuss what happened only to find the interpreter crying. She said, “after this happened, the interpreter blocked me on everything, including WhatsApp and I never saw or worked with that interpreter again. They disappeared!”. Sophie felt some interpreters were “more used to working in further education or smaller colleges” and potentially found HE settings challenging. She elaborated:

They [interpreters] need to self-evaluate their suitability for specific assignments, rather than viewing it as a paid job. There are some interpreters out there who are able to decide if they are the right fit and have even declined work because weren’t comfortable interpreting numbers for example, which is fair. We need more interpreters to take the same approach.

Sorcha echoed this view, stating that some interpreters were not suited to educational interpreting and “a lot of interpreters prefer to do education because it’s regular income and their schedule is fixed”. Sorcha elaborated:

They should first work to meet as many as possible, go to a wide variety of jobs and then after a few years, then go into education, medical and legal. ... They need to go back to basics and start interpreting in many different settings first so they can improve on their signing style, be able to adapt and expand their vocabulary. Their vocabulary coming out of graduating is very limited, but yet they are going into colleges straight away... .

Siobhán and Sinéad described incidents during their college work placements where they believed interpreters breached ethical codes and reported these to the DSS. Siobhán joined an online meeting with her manager and interpreter, only to find the interpreter accompanied by another person. When she asked for clarification, the interpreter identified the second person as their partner. Feeling “uncomfortable” with the situation, Siobhán exited the meeting and later warned another deaf student about the interpreter. An interpreter working with Sinéad, who had worked with her throughout her course, approached Sinéad’s manager at the end of the work placement to promote themselves for future projects. Sinéad felt this was “crossing the line” as the interpreter “attempted to apply that knowledge to get a job opportunity”. After lodging a complaint, the interpreter withdrew from working with her.

As previously discussed, lack of preparation and subject knowledge were factors identified by interpreters affecting the quality of interpreting. However, interpreters also noted fatigue and a lack of experience as other factors affecting quality. Ian agreed with Sorcha's view that interpreters need "world experience" and "exposure to signing styles and different domains, different environments" before entering education. Imogen felt "inclined to suggest that educational interpreting might be more suited for interpreters with some level of experience".

Issac acknowledged the diversity of interpreter styles, noting that some were "really good at formal, but really bad at casual" and how this can potentially influence how they are perceived by students. He emphasised:

The interpreter's confidence is really important... the best advice I ever got was that whole idea that we're like ducks, cool, calm and collected but underwater we are flapping! You know, and as long as you can keep that cool, calm, collected exterior you're good to go. But it was also that idea of *'fake it 'til you make it'*. If you are nervous, if you show fear, then no-one is going to trust you.

Many interpreters reported working alone, which contributed to fatigue and isolation, both of which were perceived to impact quality. Ian described it was "really hard working in isolation", requiring constant self-monitoring. Ingrid noted that academic content "can be heavy", accompanied by "long days" and limited support: "There were days where it was really hard and really tiring, and I had no-one to vent to or just to have a [de]brief". Iris felt isolated with "no opportunity to, you know, talk to anybody about it", alongside exhaustion. Imogen highlighted limited capacity to process information and believed having two interpreters was a "must for quality of interpretation". Isla reflected on the demanding nature of educational interpreting:

As an interpreter job, I think it [educational interpreting] is probably one of the most difficult, because of the long hours working alone, and I think that really affects the education students can receive, because interpreter quality drops.

Isabelle describes educational interpreting "one of the harder areas of interpreting", due the combination of subject-specific vocabulary, lack of preparation, unfamiliar topics, and

full days requiring “stamina”. Ivy made a deliberate decision to stop regular educational interpreting, describing it as “very stressful” due to multiple challenges, including lack of preparation, insufficient breaks, working alone, managing difficult lecturers, and taking on additional support roles for students:

It is a double-edged thing, because on the one hand, you do have a lot of new interpreters in who, maybe, are not that great yet. But if they are put into a situation where they are solo and then added to that they have got a lecturer who is not giving them anything, who is not slowing down, who is in their way constantly... so the interpreter is disempowered, and it makes them look bad, even if they are a really talented interpreter. And that is why you will hear things in the Deaf Community about *“such-and-such is not great”*.

Lecturers in this study previously acknowledged the complexity of interpreting subject-specific terminology and emphasised the importance of interpreters seeking clarification. Liam reflected on his own evolving awareness of the role of interpreters in HE settings.

The more I think about it, the more obvious it is that a skilled interpreter is necessary, isn't it, and is highly necessary, especially for college level stuff, you know, where you're dealing a lot with abstract concepts and, you know, all sorts of ideas. ... They need to be reliable, they need to turn up, they need to know their own limitations in terms of how long they can continue with good quality interpretation and then lots of experience...

4.6 Capacity Building

The final theme identified in the data explores capacity building across stakeholders. Participants discussed preconceptions about the interpreter's role, often stemming from limited understanding or experience, awareness-raising, and competence-building in educational interpreting.

4.6.1 Perceptions and Misconceptions of the Interpreter's Role

None of the deaf students in this study had prior experience with educational interpreters before entering HE. Sophie noted that “sometimes the interpreter is the first ‘service’ a deaf person would use in education,” and suggested that interpreters may need to guide students in understanding their role. Reflecting on her own journey, she wondered whether earlier exposure to interpreters in secondary school might have improved her awareness of the interpreter’s role.

While most interpreters reported discussing their role with students at various stages, this topic was not directly addressed with the students by any lecturers. All interpreters observed a general lack of awareness among deaf students regarding the interpreter’s role, which five attributed to the young age profile of which students enter HE. Isabelle said she often found herself “showing the deaf student how to work with interpreters.” Iris emphasised setting boundaries, “because if they’re seeing an interpreter for the first time, their impression of how you act, is then of all interpreters... especially if they are 18 or 19 coming straight from school”. Four interpreters advocated for deaf students to receive “formal training” or “education” on how to work with interpreters. Imogen suggested this training could be led by current deaf students or graduates.

Most deaf students, except Sinéad, indicated that interpreters typically took the lead in communicating their role with lecturers. Sinéad would introduce interpreters herself if they had not already done so. She recalled an incident with a guest lecturer:

As the lecturer took attendance... they looked at the interpreter, who introduced themselves. The lecturer then questioned why they were present and who had given them permission to be there. ... When I tried to clarify the situation myself, the lecturer did not allow me to do so, and the interpreter continued to explain but did not ask me to contribute. I expected the interpreter to redirect the lecturer’s attention to me so that I can explain, so that I could take the lead, so that the lecturer would respect me almost. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen, and I ended up feeling uncomfortable then.

All interpreter participants reported discussing their role with lecturers, acknowledging they may be unfamiliar with interpreters or may have “never met a deaf person before”. Isla explained that she speaks with lecturers “make sure that they understand what our role is in

translating” and to “support us as much as they can” through resource sharing. This view was echoed by all interpreters.

Some interpreters also shared other aspects, such as interjecting during class, advising on speaking pace, and appropriate communication etiquette with deaf students. Ian and Isaac also explained that interpreters do not complete exams or earn qualifications. Ian, along with Isabelle, Iris, Ivy, and Ingrid, said they sometimes had to explain that they were not responsible for providing academic support or assessing student performance. Ivy elaborated:

Sometimes with some students you might find yourself drawn into a discussion about pedagogical things. I have had situations before where deaf students did not seem to be progressing the way the lecturer or teacher expected, and quite often they might ask you, in a roundabout way or a direct way, *‘Are they okay? Is there anything else I can do for them?’* And it is really important at that point to be aware of your boundaries and to make those clear.

Iris emphasised the importance of relationship building, particularly in cases where lecturers may have “never really had a second person in their classroom or lecture space” and may feel there is an “observer in their classroom”. Ian and Ivy echoed this, noting a “fear of maybe, being checked up on”. Ivy stressed the need for a shift in perceptions and advocated for a relationship based on “partnership and cooperation” between lecturers and interpreters. Isabelle reflected on the challenges of being recognised as a professional, particularly in her early years as a young female interpreter, by both lecturers and mature students. Isaac noted that interpreters are sometimes seen as a “helper” or “aid” rather than a “fellow professional” and stressed the importance of building professional relationships to challenge these misconceptions:

A lot of the time it is around dispelling people’s fears of what an interpreter actually is, and you know, stroking professional egos is a big one. Particularly at university level... because they don’t necessarily view you as a professional. So, it’s to try and get that professional relationship going.

4.6.2 Stakeholders' Awareness and Learning

As previously discussed, interpreters educated both lecturers and deaf students about their role and signposted relevant services. Most lecturers expressed appreciation for the interpreters' expertise. Laura was guided by the in-house interpreters and had "respect for their knowledge, their educational background, [and] their insight". Lucy felt she "learned a lot from the interpreters about the [interpreting] process," recognising its complexity. Lorraine described the interpreter as "confident" and "was able to take charge of their role."

Lecturers also noted that teaching deaf students enhanced their own learning. Laura described it as "a teaching experience I loved, and it was a learning experience I think a lot of my students loved" and shared feedback from a hearing student of becoming more aware of working with interpreters. Lucy engaged in discussions on theoretical issues, saying she "learned a lot... all the questions about the Deaf Community and the reservations deaf people have about being considered disabled". Liam echoed this and said their deaf student challenged them on Deaf culture, but reiterated "it was a great relationship, and very, very fruitful and I did learn a whole lot, even though that's not what they were there for." Lily received feedback from hearing students who appreciated content tailored to deaf students. She reflected:

I learned a lot from having those students. ... a lot of our work with early literacy is around the phonological aural oral piece. It really made me stop and think a bit more about how that works, and I suppose the considerations that are there for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. So, I learned a lot from that, and while it was definitely more work and meant I had to do a bit more preparation, it's work that was, in my view, worth doing and I think that for sure, the broader cohort benefited.

4.6.3 Interpreter Training and Readiness

Although all interpreters began working in HE within a year of graduating, many expressed concerns about this common practice and the need for specialised training in educational interpreting. Iris described new interpreters being "thrown into educational interpreting straight away, which is bizarre". Ivy and Ian noted that this pathway is often seen as "what new interpreters do" and is considered "safe". However, Isabelle challenged this assumption, stating, "usually it is seen as a low-risk environment to go into, but it is actually

not. I think it is one of the harder areas of interpreting”. Isla agreed, describing educational interpreting as “one of the tougher interpreter jobs... and it’s the newly qualified interpreters who are doing that kind of work”. Iris added that “new interpreters going into education are just struggling”. Ingrid, a newly qualified interpreter, shared:

In college it is known that when you graduate you are going straight into education work. I do not know what the reason is. Is it because people think that it is the easiest? I do not think it is the easiest, I actually think it is very difficult.

Some interpreters acknowledged that new graduates may lack the confidence to manage situations in HE, particularly in building relationships or dealing with difficult lecturers. Isabelle reflected that early in her career, it was “hard sometimes to be taken seriously,” though she now feels “more assertive.” Ivy noted that experienced interpreters often leave educational settings due to working conditions, leaving “interpreters who are newer, who are less able to challenge” to take on these roles.

Sorcha argued “interpreters should not be going into education after they finish graduating” due to limited experience and vocabulary. She advocated for “more in-depth training of how to work in education” and highlighted managing interactions with students and lecturers, role-shift and signing styles as key areas. Siobhán questioned the relevance of interpreters studying deaf history subjects during training, suggesting it is more “important for them to learn about ISL signs for computing, IT, engineering, accountancy [and] finance, especially if they will be interpreting in that area”. Isla pointed to a “huge gap” in training on subject-specific terminology, while Imogen noted the prevalence of “ethical dilemmas” in the role that “we are never taught in college.” Isabelle echoed this, citing the need for training to address “all of the extra stuff that goes on.”

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the key findings from interviews with deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers organised around five overarching, yet interconnected themes: student inclusion, relational dynamics, classroom environment, intricacies of educational interpreting and capacity building. The findings revealed both systemic challenges and areas of progress. Stakeholders underscored the importance of flexible access supports shaped by institutional policies, collaborative relationships, and increased awareness of each stakeholder’s role

within the triad. Classroom environments and teaching practices influenced participation and comprehension, while educational interpreting posed unique challenges related to cognitive load, preparation, subject knowledge, and interpreter readiness.

In the next chapter, I will explore how these findings align with, challenge, or extend existing literature and consider their implications in Irish HE settings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4, drawing on the five overarching themes: *student inclusion, relational dynamics, classroom environment, intricacies of educational interpreting, and capacity building*. Each theme is examined, drawing connections to the existing literature presented in Chapter 2 and additional readings where relevant. The discussion also aims to interpret the findings, highlight areas of alignment and divergence with previous research, and consider the broader implications and relevance to Irish contexts.

5.2 Student Inclusion

5.2.1 Access and Policy in Practice

A range of accommodations such as interpreting, notetaking, captioning and transcription were seemingly available to students, corroborating the effectiveness of the FSD in resourcing HEIs (HEA, 2024). While all deaf students availed of interpreting and notetaking as their primary supports, some appreciated the flexibility to choose supports that best suited the nature of each module. For example, students enrolled in numerically intensive modules found interpreting less effective with captioning suggested as a more suitable alternative, echoing Marschark et al.'s (2008) research on the limitations of mediated learning in technical disciplines. For some, understanding which supports worked best developed over time as they became more familiar with their learning styles and the course content. This aligns with Powell's (2011) and Van Den Heuij et al.'s (2022) findings, which highlight that DHH students often enter HE without a clear understanding of accommodations.

However, issues surrounding notetakers were raised by participants, leading to frustration among students who relied on these notes for key deadlines. This suggests a potential overreliance on notetakers and that students may not be adequately equipped to manage the simultaneous demands of taking their own notes while watching interpreters (Kermit & Holiman, 2018). These challenges raise questions about students' responsibility in managing their own learning, as well as the need for clearer role definitions and expectations for notetakers.

Powell (2011) and Lang (2002) emphasise the importance of self-advocacy skills for DHH students in communicating their needs effectively. While some students demonstrated such skills, for most, this was not immediate. The findings suggest that this delay may be attributed to a combination of factors, including the young age profile of students entering HE, their confidence levels, their first experience of being in a mainstream, predominately hearing environment and using educational interpreters for the first time.

Interpreter availability emerged as a concern across all three stakeholder groups, reaffirming that the demand for interpreters continues to exceed the existing supply (SLIS, 2017). This shortage resulted in some courses lacking the recommended two interpreters, and in other cases, students were unable to participate fully. For example, one student received no alternative access when interpreters were unavailable, while another was provided with transcriptions of class recordings as a substitute. These contrasting experiences highlight discrepancies in support provision across HEIs and suggest that some DSS are more proactive than others in identifying alternative accommodations. As Frumos and Roşu (2019), Hyde et al. (2016) and Van Den Heuij et al. (2022) observed, the quality of accommodations is shaped not only by national and institutional contexts but also the expertise and attitudes of the staff responsible for delivering them.

Inconsistencies in DSS practices across HEIs were noted by both interpreters and lecturers, particularly in relation to the level of support provided. Some interpreters described having to advocate and educate DSS staff on interpreting-related issues, while others acknowledged that the DSS could act as a supportive ally. However, many lecturers in this study reported limited direct engagement with the DSS. The findings reveal that lecturers teaching co-enrolled groups often did not engage directly with the DSS regarding students' access requirements. For two other lecturers, one received no prior notice from the DSS about having a deaf student or an interpreter in their class, while another received no guidance on how to work with interpreters. This contradicts established guidance on the role of DSS, which states that the DSS is responsible for facilitating the disclosure of accommodations to relevant stakeholders as part of the needs assessment process, with the student's consent and to provide guidelines on ISL interpretation (AHEAD & DAWN, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2018). If such disclosure gaps exist for students whose access needs are more visible, such as deaf students using interpreters, it raises important questions about how effectively the DSS informs lecturers about accommodating students who may have non-visible disabilities. These findings raise broader concerns about institutional readiness (Cawthon et al., 2014).

5.3.2 Towards Holistic Inclusion

Despite the presence of access supports, many students in single-settings reported feeling “different”, “lonely” and “isolated”, a perception echoed by interpreters who observed similar experiences among deaf students in these settings. This sense of difference was exacerbated in situations where interpreters arrived late or when lecturers drew attention to the interpreter’s presence. The emotional labour of managing this visibility resonates with the literature on the impact of being “outed” as a person with a disability (Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013; Leeson, 2012; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Powell et al., 2014; Van Den Heuif et al., 2022). Interestingly, only one lecturer reported observing low confidence in their deaf student in a single-setting. However, it is important to note that the majority of lecturers in this study had experience of teaching co-enrolled groups, where experiences were generally more positive.

Social experiences outside of the classroom emerged as a prominent theme among interpreters. They believed these interactions were crucial for fostering relationships between deaf students and their hearing peers, especially in single-student environments. Despite experiencing fatigue, interpreters often skipped their breaks to support communication between deaf and hearing students, recognising the value of these informal interactions and the opportunities they provide for incidental learning. This aligns with the findings of Powell et al. (2014), which showed that the majority of students felt their hearing loss negatively impacted on casual interactions and incidental learning with peers, contributing to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. For two students in co-enrolled groups, their hearing peers knew or learned some ISL, which helped foster a “sense of connection”. These insights suggest that the presence of a critical mass of deaf students, combined with greater peer support, may contribute to a stronger sense of belonging among deaf students compared to those in single-student settings.

However, the reliance on interpreters for social connection highlights the limitations of current support structures. According to the FSD guidelines, funded access supports cover only academic contact hours (HEA, 2024). As a result, they do not typically extend to lunch breaks, extracurricular activities, or social events. This gap not only affects students’ ability to build peer relationships but also limits their access to informal academic knowledge. Another shortcoming of the FSD was highlighted by a student who pursued further studies at a private college and was subsequently denied interpreting support due to an apparent lack of funding. Since the FSD is limited to approved courses, many of which exclude private commercial

colleges, these institutions may invoke the ‘nominal cost’ clause⁵ outlined in the *Equal Status Act 2000* to justify the refusal of interpreting supports. This raises concerns about the equity and inclusiveness of the current funding model. By restricting access supports to a limited range of institutions and courses, the system marginalises DHH students who may wish to seek alternative educational pathways or participate in further postgraduate and professional development.

Although some deaf students and interpreters noted a positive shift towards inclusion and growing awareness of the needs of DHH students, not all HEIs operated at the same level. Participants who had experience with co-enrolled groups generally reported more positive experiences compared to those in single-student settings. However, it is important to contextualise these experiences. At the time of data collection, five of the DHH students were no longer enrolled in HE, and all interviews were conducted prior to the implementation of the ALTITUDE Charter (AHEAD, 2024a; Banks et al., 2024) and widespread uptake of UDL initiatives such as the UDL Digital Badge. This means the participants’ experiences reflect a period that may have been more variable and dependent on individual staff or institutional culture. While national frameworks are now in place to promote systemic change (Banks et al., 2024; HEA, 2022), these findings suggest a need for sustained implementation, monitoring, and culture change across the HE sector.

Meaningful inclusion requires a holistic approach that addresses both academic and social dimensions, supported by consistent institutional practices, adequate funding, and interpreter availability, and inclusive policy frameworks. The provision of access supports alone does not guarantee inclusion. Rather, it is the quality, consistency, availability, and responsiveness of these supports, alongside students’ social experiences and connection with peers, that shape a sense of inclusion in HE.

5.3 Relational Dynamics

5.3.1 Negotiating Roles and Responsibilities

Participants highlighted that deaf students often assume additional responsibilities not typically expected of their hearing peers, responsibilities frequently described as a “burden”.

⁵ Section 4 (2) states: “A refusal or failure to provide the special treatment or facilities... shall not be deemed reasonable unless such provision would give rise to a cost, other than a nominal cost, to the provider of the service in question” (*Equal Status Act, 2000*).

This added labour was seen as detracting from the overall student experience and reinforcing a sense of inequality when compared to their hearing peers. This reflects findings by McGrotty and Sheridan (2019) who observed that deaf students often experience uncertainty around their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Powell (2011), Hyde et al. (2016) and Van Den Heuvel et al. (2022) emphasised the disproportionate burden of self-advocacy placed on DHH students. However, as discussed, the development of self-advocacy skills was not immediate for many deaf students referred to in this study. Furthermore, the need to manage and negotiate supports may contribute to additional cognitive and emotional load, what Konrad (2021) describes as “access fatigue”. For example, Sophie frequently engaged with interpreters and assessed the most appropriate access support she needed, which she felt reduced her time for academic preparation. This raises critical questions about institutional readiness and the role of the DSS. It may inadvertently shift institutional responsibility onto deaf students, despite their lack of clarity or preparation to assume such roles.

Interpreters were widely recognised as facilitators of communication, yet their role often extended beyond this. A clear paradox emerged: while deaf students emphasised the interpreter’s primary function as relaying information, interpreters described much of their work as advocacy, signposting to services, and guiding students through HE. This reveals a tension between students’ formal expectations and the practical realities interpreters face. Interpreters in this study expressed a sense of benevolence, striving to blend in, adapting their appearance, and recognising the need to “fill in the gaps” left by absent support systems.

Role ambiguity regarding interpreters was not just limited to deaf students. Interpreters reported that lecturers often expected them to share insights into students’ academic progress or assist with learning support, such as proofreading. This aligns with Nikolarazi and Kofidou’s (2024) findings that lecturers rely on interpreters to confirm whether DHH students have understood the content, a practice also noted in the literature on elementary settings (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001). Many interpreters reported discomfort with these expectations and raised ethical concerns, particularly around transcribing of assignments or exams. This blurring of boundaries reflects Prinzi’s (2022, 2024) findings in K-12 settings, where interpreters often assumed educator-like roles, supporting both deaf students and teachers. It also conflicts with AHEAD and DAWN (2018) guidance, which defines the interpreter’s role as facilitating communication between students who are deaf, their peers, and college staff, not providing academic feedback or learning supports nor to act as a scribe. These tensions raise important questions about effectiveness of this guidance, role clarity, academic integrity, professional

ethics, and whether interpreters are being positioned, intentionally or not, as de facto support workers.

Lecturers are often viewed primarily as content deliverers by deaf students and interpreters who emphasise the importance of inclusive teaching and showing genuine interest in students' backgrounds. This perspective aligns with broader research on student-lecturer relationships, particularly the importance of building rapport and respect (Cladera, 2021; Titus & Roman, 2019) and with studies focusing specifically on DHH students which highlight the influence of lecturer attitudes and awareness on inclusion (Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Kermit & Holiman, 2018). Participants in this study reported that lecturers who recognised interpreters as co-professionals and maintained regular communication were more likely to foster engagement and inclusion. These practices were most evident in co-enrolled settings. In contrast, such engagement was notably absent in single-student settings or large classrooms, echoing Uleanya's (2020) observation that limited contact time can restrict meaningful interaction. These findings reaffirm the lecturer's central role in shaping inclusive learning environments through intentional engagement and collaboration.

5.3.2 Building Trust Through Familiarity and Collaboration

Triadic discussions about working together, where the student, interpreter, and lecturer engaged collaboratively, were rare but highly valued. Most discussions occurred in dyads, with interpreters acting as the central link, particularly in single-student settings. Students consistently highlighted the importance of collaboration between interpreters and lecturers, noting that when they worked together, it significantly reduced the burden and enhanced their learning experience. Their reflections suggest that when this happens, the student is positioned primarily as a learner and helps reduce access fatigue, allowing for fuller engagement with the educational content.

Interpreters and lecturers in this study frequently described trust, transparency, and open communication as key factors in fostering effective relationships. Interpreters reported that while some lecturers adopted a collaborative approach, others perceived interpreters as intrusive or simply as conduits for access. For example, Liam stated that, in hindsight, he did not see the interpreter as a "partner" in the relationship. This perception aligns with Prinzi's (2024) findings, which suggest that interpreters are often positioned as access providers. Lecturers with experience of co-enrolled groups were more likely to report positive and collaborative relationships. This suggests that the presence of multiple deaf students may

enhance their visibility in the classroom, prompting lecturers to adopt more collaborative approaches. This may also support Kermit and Holiman's (2018) findings, where co-enrolled students felt they were viewed as a cultural-linguistic group rather than a group of disabled students. This aligns with broader findings on varying levels of lecturer competence and deaf awareness, which ranged from stereotyping and indifference to open and inquisitive (Kermit & Holiman, 2018).

Interpreter familiarity emerged as a key factor in building trust and facilitating effective communication for both students and lecturers. Students with regular interpreters reported greater confidence, reduced anxiety, and a sense of consistency, while lecturers observed smoother and more efficient communication. These findings support previous research highlighting the benefits of interpreter familiarity, including co-construction of vocabulary, enhances recall, and improved interpreting pace (Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019). However, participants cautioned against an overreliance on regular interpreters, noting that it may lead to dependency, blurred boundaries, and limited exposure to diverse interpreting styles. These concerns are reflected in the work of Antia and Kreimeyer (2001), Leeson (2012), and Yarger (2001).

These findings underscore the importance of clearly defined roles, sustained collaboration, and relational trust. Addressing these relational dynamics is essential for creating learning environments that are not only accessible but genuinely equitable.

5.4 Classroom Environment

5.4.1 Visual Accessibility and Peer Interactions

Participants highlighted difficulties maintaining sightlines in large lecture halls, cramped classrooms, poorly lit spaces and during practical demonstrations such as lab work or computer-based activities; challenges consistently reflected in the literature (Kermit & Holiman, 2018; Nikolaraizi & Kofidou, 2021, 2024; Powell et al., 2014; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022; Winston, 1994). Interpreters worked with deaf students to find optimal classroom positioning and supported their autonomy in choosing when and how to engage with interpreted content. Yet, some students perceived an "obligation" to maintain eye-contact with interpreters, leading to fatigue. This reflects the findings of Kermit and Holiman (2018), who note that the visual nature of sign language access requires sustained concentration, often without the natural breaks afforded to hearing students. Unlike hearing peers, who access

spoken content auditorily, deaf students may rely on both visual and auditory channels (Hayward & Rohatyn-Martin, 2016). Therefore, while efforts by interpreters to support student autonomy and flexible engagement may be appreciated by deaf students, they also raise concerns about whether educational content may be compromised as a result, and whether lecturers are aware of these nuances.

When dialogue occurred behind the deaf student's position in the classroom, the combination of rapid exchanges, the student's diverted gaze, and interpretation lag often forced interpreters to prioritise certain content for interpretation (Napier, 2005; Stinson & Lang, 1994; Winston, 1994). One interpreter made an interesting observation: deaf students are more interested in *who* said it rather than *what* they said. Hall (2018) refers to this as visio-environmental information, which can offer subtle social cues that are critical for building relationships and navigating education settings. These issues, echoed by Wolbers et al. (2012) and corroborated by interpreters in this study, led to omissions or alterations in classroom discourse. In group settings, interpreters expressed concern about being perceived as authoritative when managing turn-taking, which they feared might disrupt group dynamics. Contrary to Prinzi's (2024) suggestion that such perceptions of authoritativeness may weaken the deaf student-interpreter relationship, albeit in elementary contexts, deaf students generally reported positive experiences with group work. This contradicts findings with several previous studies (Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Hyde et al., 2016; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022).

Where difficulties arose in group work, they were most pronounced in co-enrolled settings with insufficient interpreters to mixed deaf and hearing groups. While many participants noted that deaf students preferred working together, others emphasised the benefits of inclusion for mutual learning and relationship building. Interestingly, Lily observed that hearing students rarely opted to sit with the co-enrolled deaf students during group work, which suggests some level of unconscious bias or discomfort with communication. These findings suggest that interpreter provision alone does not guarantee inclusion; proactive planning by lecturers is essential to foster equitable collaboration.

5.4.2 Teaching Practices and Engagement

Lecturers' teaching styles and attitudes played a pivotal role in shaping deaf students' participation and engagement, reaffirming the value of inclusive approaches (Al Hashimi et al., 2021; Cladera, 2021; Deering & Williams, 2019; Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Kermit & Holiman, 2018; Nikolarazi & Kofidou, 2021; Titus & Roman, 2019; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022). In this study,

lecturers generally demonstrated a strong awareness of inclusive and accessible practices, adopting UDL principles, such as modifying materials, adjusting speaking pace and positioning, and occasionally using ISL (Kermit & Holiman, 2018; Nikolaraizi & Kofidou, 2024).

However, this contrasted sharply with the broader experiences reported by deaf students and interpreters in this study, who reported inconsistent approaches and a reliance on individual goodwill. Common issues included inaccessible materials and fast-paced delivery styles, which affected interpreter accuracy (Al Hashimi et al., 2021; Napier, 2005; Pirone et al., 2018). Lecturers' attitudes varied widely from proactive and collaborative to passive and resistant. This spectrum reflects findings from Kermit and Holiman (2018) on lecturer competence and findings on attitudinal barriers by Frumos & Roşu (2019) and Van Den Heuij et al. (2022). While the presence of co-enrolled groups occasionally prompted greater awareness, this was not guaranteed. Lecturers in this study maintained their teaching style remained unchanged, irrespective of group size.

This discrepancy suggests that the inclusive practices described by lecturers in this study may represent an anomaly rather than the norm. It is worth noting that half of the lecturers interviewed held formal teaching qualifications, something that is neither a requirement nor typical for lecturers in HE. The same three lecturers also received formal training on supporting SWD in the classroom, while two others reported receiving informal training. This raises questions about whether inclusive teaching practices are more likely to emerge among those who have received pedagogical training or specific training in supporting SWD. Furthermore, while the implementation of UDL principles can enhance accessibility, the framework developed by CAST (2024), does not explicitly address the unique challenges that interpreter-mediated education presents such as lag time and competing visual demands (Hayward & Rohatyn-Martin, 2016; Napier, 2005; Pirone et al., 2018; Winston, 1994). This points to a gap in guidance for lecturers on how to work effectively with interpreters and adapt their teaching delivery to support interpretation.

Deaf students' motivation and participation were closely tied to their confidence, peer support, and the relationship with lecturers and interpreters. Deaf students in single-student settings were often hesitant to engage, fearing embarrassment or being misunderstood. In contrast, co-enrolled groups fostered a sense of solidarity and shared experience. Students in these settings were more likely to participate actively, support one another, and check understanding collaboratively, with students supporting each other and engaging more actively. This supports Kermit and Holiman's (2018) findings where co-enrolled students found comfort

by having strength in numbers. While it seems co-enrolment may enhance motivation and engagement, it also raises questions about equity. As deaf students are more likely to experience single-student settings, the reliance on peer and relationship dynamics, rather than systemic inclusion, highlights a critical gap in how HE environments and stakeholders are designed and supported. To foster a learning environment where deaf students are genuinely included, inclusive teaching practices must go beyond surface-level adjustments and accommodations.

5.5 Intricacies of Educational Interpreting

5.5.1 Managing Visual Demands and Lexical Gaps

Building on the challenges of the classroom environment, the linguistic demands further complicate access. The lack of established ISL signs for technical or discipline-specific terminology emerged as a recurring issue mentioned by both deaf students and interpreters. Students described moments of confusion when interpreters used incorrect or overly literal signs, defaulted to fingerspelling without explanation or omitted fingerspelling key terminology altogether. These challenges are not unique to Ireland; comparable issues regarding the limitations of sign language lexicons in academic contexts have been documented in studies from various countries (Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Guarinello et al., 2008; Hyde et al., 2016; Napier & Barker, 2004; Pirone et al., 2018). Although there have been notable developments and initiatives over the past decade aimed at creating and standardising ISL vocabulary in domains such as STEM, politics, and employment (DCU, 2019; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2023; IDS, 2025), these efforts remain limited in scope, funding dependent, and do not adequately cover the wide range of academic disciplines that students may pursue. In addition, questions remain about how these ISL signs are disseminated and communicated to ensure their integration into the language. Without proper training or clear dissemination mechanisms, there is a risk these signs may not be widely adopted or recognised, thereby limiting their effectiveness in academic contexts.

Building on this, students and interpreters often held pre-class meetings to agree on signs, a practice that enhanced comprehension and consistency. Subsequently, interpreters collaborated with colleagues by sharing agreed-upon signs, helping to maintain consistency and ease the cognitive demands on the student. This approach aligns with the findings of McGrotty and Sheridan (2019) and Blankmeyer Burke and Nicodemus (2013), who emphasise

that familiarity and collaboration are essential to developing a shared academic lexicon. This additional labour, often carried out outside of formal academic contact hours, raises questions about the sustainability and equity of the FSD. This practice is not acknowledged within the existing guidance provided by AHEAD and DAWN (2018), suggesting a lack of institutional awareness regarding the extra time and effort required from both parties. Furthermore, many deaf students and interpreters may be unfamiliar with new academic vocabulary and are simultaneously navigating complex educational environments. The expectation that they take on this preparatory work without formal recognition or support risks placing an undue burden and highlights gaps in current support structures.

Deaf students in this study reported difficulties in simultaneously watching interpreters and following concepts or demonstrations on screens, a challenge that was exacerbated in numerically intensive or visually complex subjects. Their experiences lend support to Winston's (1994) argument that an interpreted education requires constant refocusing across competing visual inputs, which may compromise comprehension. Although Marschark et al. (2004, 2005, 2008) concluded that mediated learning does not significantly impact overall comprehension, reading ability was identified as a key predictor of success in maths and science (Marschark et al., 2005). This points to a need for a closer examination of broader cognitive and contextual factors, many of which were raised by participants in this study. These included interpreters' concerns about deaf students' literacy and deaf students' concerns regarding interpreter competency.

5.5.2 Interpreter Preparation and Subject Familiarity

Interpreter preparation and subject familiarity emerged as critical factors in the quality of educational interpreting, aligning with findings in the literature (Al Hashimi et al., 2021; Guarinello et al., 2008; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Napier & Barker, 2004). Although lecturers in this study and those within co-enrolled groups displayed an awareness of the need to share preparatory materials, deaf students, and interpreters frequently reported inconsistencies in the provision and accessibility of such materials, revealing further tensions. While students placed the responsibility on lecturers, interpreters often reported lecturers' reluctance to provide materials, despite ethical assurances. However, this reluctance may also stem from a lack of awareness of the interpreter's role, as well as additional pressures faced by lecturers, including high workloads, time constraints, and concerns about preserving their academic expertise or professional boundaries.

Interestingly, two interpreters employed directly by the HEIs reported that there was an expectation for lecturers to share materials. This raises questions whether these lecturers received training, or whether the interpreter's status as staff members influenced lecturers' perceptions, potentially leading them to view interpreters more as colleagues than external service providers. Leeson (2012) identified the lack of preparation materials as a challenge in Irish tertiary education, noting that access alone is insufficient. Lecturers must also acknowledge that interpretation is not a literal translation, while interpreters must also grasp the pedagogical methods used by lecturers (Leeson, 2012). This raises further questions about the clarity of institutional roles. A more proactive stance from DSS, alongside updated guidance which places clear responsibilities on lecturers to collaborate and share materials, could help mitigate these tensions.

Expanding on this, deaf students expressed frustration when interpreters lacked familiarity with course content, particularly in technical subjects, which led to incomplete or unclear interpretations (Frumos & Roşu, 2019; Guarinello et al., 2008; Pirone et al., 2018). Equally, interpreters with prior knowledge of the subject were perceived as more effective, highlighting the value of discipline-specific expertise (Blankmeyer Burke & Nicodemus, 2013; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Napier, 2005; Napier & Barker, 2004). However, expecting interpreters to possess in-depth knowledge of every subject they interpret for is impractical. Adding to this, interpreters reported a need to also understand the visual aspect, such as physical objects, in order to provide a more fluent and contextually accurate interpretation. Without an understanding or access to visuals, this can compromise the clarity of the message and further impact deaf students' comprehension.

This frustration experienced by deaf students, while understandable, reveals a deeper contradiction: interpreters are expected to deliver accurate interpretations, yet they are denied access to preparatory materials, which directly contributes to unfamiliarity with content and places interpreters in a difficult position. Furthermore, interpreters frequently reported working in isolation and long hours without breaks which they perceived as impacting quality; this not only feeds into the student's perceptions of interpreter's competence but also provides a rationale for the information filtering and strategic decisions interpreters make (Leeson, 2012; Marschark et al., 2004; Napier, 2005; Napier & Barker, 2004; Pirone et al., 2018; Stinson & Lang, 1994; Wolbers et al., 2012).

Interpreter preparation was not solely dependent on lecturers; interpreters also described engaging in collaborative and preparatory practices with one another. They

emphasised the benefits of working in teams with a co-interpreter, particularly for support and debrief opportunities. However, as co-interpreting is not a common occurrence, establishing communication channels with other interpreters who rotated assignments involving the deaf student was essential as they may never overlap with one another. These channels facilitated the sharing of new vocabulary, logistical handover information, and other relevant details to ensure continuity.

Despite these efforts, ethical concerns were raised regarding data protection of these channels and client-confidentiality, particularly among newer interpreters, who expressed hesitation about discussing specific students with other interpreters working with the same student. This reluctance to share information may inadvertently compromise the deaf student's experience, as they may reasonably expect interpreters to be informed about their preferences and background context. If this expectation is not met, it may result in inconsistencies in interpretation. Notably, these challenges were not reflected in the literature reviewed from other countries, suggesting that such ethical tensions may be under-reported or country-specific. This highlights the need for a clearer ethical framework that supports collaboration among interpreters without compromising confidentiality or professional boundaries and ensures consistent, student-centred support.

5.6 Capacity Building

5.6.1 Deaf Student and Lecturer Readiness

A recurring issue across all stakeholder groups was the lack of clarity and shared understanding of the interpreter's role. Interpreters in this study frequently found themselves educating both students and lecturers about their role (Prinzi, 2022). Many deaf students are encountering interpreters for the first time in tertiary education, likely due to the systemic limitations discussed earlier. Often, they have little to no prior exposure to educational interpreting, and the data suggests there is a lack of guidance for deaf students on how to effectively work with educational interpreters. Although some guidance is available from AHEAD and DAWN (2018), this appears to be neither widely disseminated nor sufficient to fully capture the nuances described by participants in this study. Furthermore, the findings highlight the absence of a structured preparation programme that adequately addresses both transition planning and academic readiness, including information about access supports and the

development of self-advocacy skills (Lang, 2002; Leeson, 2010; McGrotty & Sheridan, 2019; Powell, 2011; Van Den Heuij et al., 2022).

An interesting observation is that while most interpreters felt formal training was necessary for deaf students, they did not explicitly suggest that lecturers should receive similar training. Instead, interpreters often assumed this responsibility themselves and appeared to accept that this was part of their role. This suggests that interpreters may view themselves not only as language facilitators but also as cultural mediators, bridging gaps between the Deaf Community and the hearing community. However, Pirone et al. (2018) caution that when interpreters lack the appropriate cultural mediation skills, their efforts may be perceived as confrontational by lecturers. Although well-intentioned, this approach may inadvertently hinder collaboration or create conflict with deaf students who may wish to engage directly with lecturers on these issues.

Lecturers who engaged proactively with interpreters and students reported positive outcomes, including greater awareness of Deaf culture and inclusive pedagogical practices. This aligns with findings by Kermit and Holiman (2018), who observed that lecturers with high deaf competence created more equitable learning environments. However, such practices were largely driven by individual motivation, rather than institutional support, suggesting a disconnect between national policy and local implementation within HEIs (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; HEA, 2022). National initiatives such as the *ALTITUDE Charter* (AHEAD, 2024a; Banks et al., 2024) aim to promote a cultural shift towards embedding inclusive practices; however, their success will depend on how effectively they are adopted. Without this alignment, inclusive practices remain reliant on the goodwill of individual educators, rather than being a systemic norm.

Notably, many lecturers in this study expressed genuine appreciation for both interpreters and deaf students, acknowledging their own learning within this dynamic. Some also reflected on the benefits for hearing students, suggesting that inclusive practices and classroom diversity within the classroom enrich the educational experience for all. This further reinforces the importance of visibility, collaboration, and a sustained commitment at a policy level to ensure students from priority groups are not only accommodated but actively supported through sustainable, institution-wide practices.

5.6.2 Interpreter Readiness

Finally, the findings raise important questions about interpreter readiness for tertiary educational settings. All interpreters in this study reported entering educational interpreting immediately after graduation, often working alone in cognitively demanding environments without adequate support. Venturi (2020) notes that this is customary practice for new graduates beginning their interpreting career in Ireland; however, it is also problematic. As discussed, educational interpreters frequently assume additional roles and responsibilities that would not be considered standard practice in other interpreting contexts. They also encounter unique linguistic, pedagogical, and ethical challenges, as described by many participants in this study. The perception that educational settings are low-risk and safe environments, as described by interpreters in this study, or that they serve as an accessible entry point for newly qualified interpreters (Venturi, 2020), is misleading. These concerns are echoed throughout the literature reviewed in this study. For instance, Schick et al. (1999) found that many educational interpreters lacked the minimum skill level required for classroom interpreting, while Yarger (2001) highlighted the isolation and lack of feedback experienced by interpreters in rural or under-resourced settings, issues that are also relevant to the Irish context.

Nearly all participants in this study believed that educational interpreting is best suited to those with more interpreting experience, aligning with views expressed by Brizendine (2018) and Rowley (2018). Participants emphasised the importance of gaining exposure to diverse signing styles, environments, and vocabulary, as well as developing the confidence needed to manage multiple, and at times, challenging stakeholders. Given the demographic profile of the interpreting profession, which is predominantly young and female (Leeson, 2012; Leeson & Venturi, 2017; McEvoy & IDS, 2025; RISLI, n.d.-b; Venturi, 2020), this is a particularly important consideration. Many new interpreters graduate from the CDS in their early twenties, having entered university directly from post-primary school. As a result, they are expected not only to work in complex educational environments across a range of disciplines but also engage with educators and academics who may have decades of experience.

For many new interpreters, this can be daunting, and may contribute to feelings of professional vulnerability, particularly if they are working in isolation. These concerns were echoed by student interpreters at the CDS, who expressed apprehension about entering the interpreting profession, citing challenges such as ISL proficiency, managing fast-paced speech, ethical decision-making, and exposure to criticism (McEvoy & IDS, 2025). This vulnerability, in

turn, can influence perceptions of interpreter competence and create a 'catch-22' type situation. As Ivy noted, many experienced interpreters choose not to work in educational settings due to the challenging conditions, leaving newer interpreters to take on these roles. This cycle perpetuates a mismatch between the complexity of the setting and the experience level of those assigned to it, further underscoring the need for systemic change in how educational interpreting is approached and supported.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the multifaceted experiences of each stakeholder through five interconnected themes. While access supports are increasingly available, the findings reveal that inclusion is shaped by consistency, interpersonal relationships, and pedagogical practices. Across the themes, a pattern of cognitive labour emerged, particularly for deaf students navigating unfamiliar systems, and for interpreters operating beyond the scope of their formal role. The findings also highlight the importance of collaboration, trust, and cultural awareness among lecturers, interpreters, and support staff. Although there are signs of progress, particularly in co-enrolled settings, the data suggests that meaningful inclusion requires sustained institutional commitment, clearer role definitions, and more formalised support structures.

These insights lay the groundwork for the final chapter, which will attempt to answer my research questions and offer recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This research aimed to understand the triadic relationship and inclusion practices by exploring the lived experiences of deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in Irish HE settings. Through a qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis of interviews within three stakeholder groups, the study examined the multifaceted nuances associated with this triad, educational interpreting, alongside the factors that shape equitable learning environments for deaf students.

In this concluding chapter, I synthesise the key insights from the study by directly addressing the three initial research questions. Following this, I offer targeted recommendations across the micro, meso, and macro levels. Finally, the chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study, suggesting areas for future research, offering my final reflections on the broader implications for the educational interpreting landscape and the Deaf Community.

6.2 Addressing the Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of an effective working relationship between the deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer?

The findings revealed that an effective working relationship between deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers is characterised by role clarity, collaboration, trust, and mutual respect. When all stakeholders share a clear understanding of their roles and engage in open communication, the classroom becomes a more equitable space. Although true triadic relationships are uncommon, they are greatly valued when present. Most interactions tend to form in dyads, with the interpreter often serving as the central link between the deaf student and lecturer. Within these dyadic relationships, interpreters are not only perceived as language facilitators but also as cultural mediators and navigators of the educational environment.

Deaf students value familiarity and consistency of interpreters, as this fosters collaboration and enables the development of tailored strategies to enhance understanding of course content. They appreciate lecturers who demonstrate inclusive pedagogical practices and a willingness to understand them as individuals. When deaf students build relationships

with both interpreters and lecturers, this often leads to increased motivation for learning, greater confidence, and reduced anxiety. However, concerns arise around dependency and blurred boundaries, particularly when long-term student-interpreter relationships evolve into friendships or when interpreters assume roles beyond their professional remit. Interpreters navigate significant role ambiguity, balancing their formal responsibility to deliver effective interpretation with informal advocacy on behalf of the deaf student. They often act as cultural bridges for lecturers, manage multiple stakeholders, and make conscious efforts to blend in to the HE environment showing adaptability. Many interpreters place a high value on professional recognition and seek to be viewed by lecturers as collaborators rather than intruders in their space. Lecturers who demonstrate inclusive attitudes and openness to collaboration are more likely to foster effective relationships. These lecturers value guidance and actively engage with both interpreters and deaf students to support inclusion. In contrast, lecturers who perceive interpreters as peripheral are less likely to build meaningful connections, which in turn can impact on the student experience.

The quality of effective relationships emerged as a critical enabler, or barrier, to inclusion and is built on intentional engagement, shared understanding, and a commitment to inclusion. When all three stakeholders are aligned, the educational experience becomes more equitable, empowering, and enriching for deaf students.

2. What is the impact on teaching practice when there is a co-enrolled group of deaf students versus just one deaf student?

While it is difficult to draw explicit conclusions due to the sample size, individual motivations, and the varied contexts in which the participants were situated, the findings suggest that the presence of co-enrolled groups can influence teaching practices. Lecturers teaching co-enrolled groups are more likely to demonstrate a willingness to collaborate with interpreters and adopt inclusive teaching strategies. These include adapting resources, ensuring accessibility of materials, adjusting their delivery style, and regularly engaging with interpreters. The presence of multiple deaf students appears to create greater visibility, prompting lecturers to be more intentional in their planning and delivery. Co-enrolled groups also foster deaf-to-deaf peer support which enhances their motivation and participation in the classroom.

In contrast, lecturers who teach a single deaf student often have less awareness of their access needs. Within these environments, deaf students frequently report feelings of isolation,

reduced participation, and a lack of visibility, particularly in large classroom settings. These feelings are often compounded by inconsistent teaching practices, fast-paced delivery, and inaccessible materials. Although some lecturers demonstrate openness to supporting inclusion, their approach is generally reactive, rather than proactive.

However, the findings also indicate that co-enrolment alone does not guarantee inclusive teaching practices; rather, it depends on the goodwill, awareness, and attitudes of individual lecturers. Co-enrolment can also present logistical challenges, particularly when there were insufficient interpreters to support deaf students in mixing with their hearing peers during group work. While co-enrolled groups tend to act as catalysts for more inclusive teaching practices, systemic support, and lecturer awareness remain essential.

3. What do deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers view to be the most effective strategies and supports to ensure inclusion of deaf students in HE settings?

Across all stakeholder groups, a combination of flexibility, intentionality, consistency, collaboration, and cultural awareness emerged as key strategies. These findings show that inclusion is a dynamic process, shaped by the readiness of stakeholders at both local and institutional levels, and by the quality of interpersonal relationships, not only within the core triad but also extending to peers, other support services such as notetakers, and the DSS.

Deaf students highlight the importance of tailored, holistic access supports that enable engagement with course content and enhance comprehension, particularly in numerically intensive or visually complex subjects. While many demonstrate resilience and adaptability, it is vital that they are equipped with the appropriate self-advocacy skills and have preparation for postsecondary transition. This is especially important when HE represents their first experience in a mainstream environment. To alleviate the burden placed on deaf students, particularly in tasks such as sharing materials with interpreters and clarifying their access support needs, proactive engagement from both the DSS and lecturers is crucial. Additionally, inclusion extends beyond the classroom with initiatives such as ISL classes for hearing students and structured opportunities for cross-group engagement playing a vital role in fostering connection and a sense of belonging.

In addition to student supports, greater clarity and recognition of the interpreter's role is needed to avoid assumptions and unrealistic expectations. This must be accompanied by a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, that is deaf students, interpreters, lecturers, and the DSS. Timely access to course materials, regular

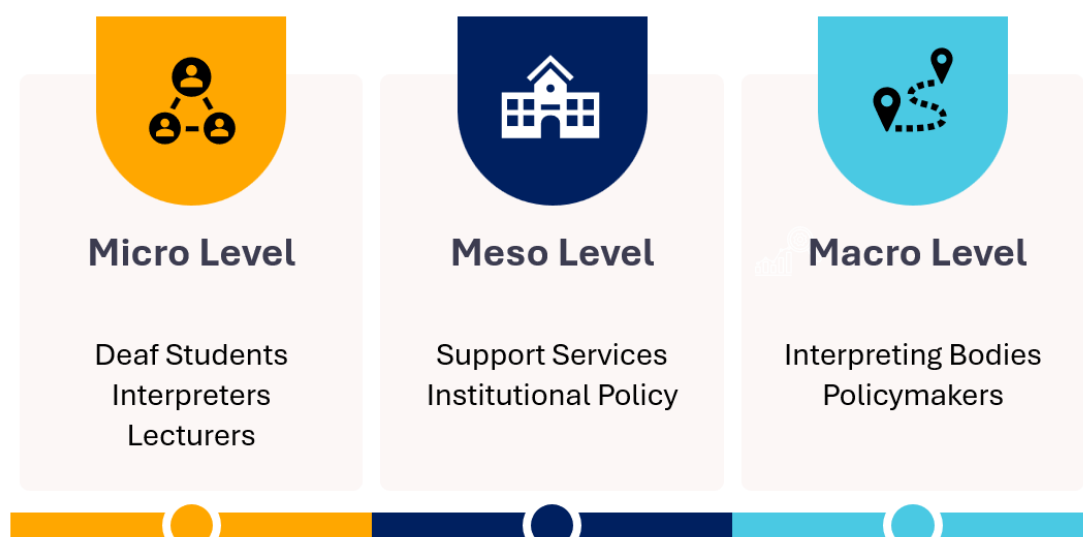
engagement with lecturers and co-interpreters are seen as critical for delivering high-quality interpretation. Inclusive teaching practices, combined with a student-centred approach and a willingness to understand the interpreting process, are key enablers of inclusion. However, a clear gap remains in guidance and accountability regarding who is responsible for equipping lecturers with the knowledge and tools to support deaf students effectively, an issue that must be addressed at both institutional and policy levels. Overall, while there are examples of good practice and promising institutional initiatives, the inclusion of deaf students in HE is not achieved through isolated interventions, but through a coordinated, consistent, and systemic approach.

6.3 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of this study, a series of targeted and interlinked recommendations are presented for various stakeholders. As discussed, effective triadic relationships do not develop in silos; rather, they are shaped by existing institutional and systemic structures. Therefore, these recommendations are framed through a broader lens to reflect the complexity of the HE environment and the need for coordinated action. Figure 6.1 illustrates how these recommendations are organised across the micro (individual), meso (institutional), and macro (policy) levels.

Figure 6.1

Micro, Meso, and Macro Level Recommendations



6.3.1 Micro Level – Deaf Students, Interpreters, and Lecturers

1. Develop a structured preparation programme for deaf students.

While some HEIs offer specific orientation programmes for students admitted through the DARE entry route (AHEAD, 2018b), deaf students would benefit from having an additional structured preparation programme. A two-day summer school for prospective DHH students attending any third-level institution was previously established in 2006 (Trinity College Dublin, 2011); unfortunately, this programme is no longer in place. Given the findings of this study, there is a clear need to reinstate such a programme to ensure deaf students are not only equipped with knowledge of available supports and clarity around roles but also gain early exposure to educational interpreting and are empowered with self-advocacy skills. With the widespread availability of digital communication channels, students are no longer constrained by geographical location. By leveraging these technologies to facilitate peer mentoring from recent graduates and establish a growing online network of DHH students, it may alleviate feelings of isolation and foster a stronger sense of community and belonging.

2. Strengthen inclusive teaching practices for deaf students.

In line with Goal 1 – Inclusivity of the *National Access Plan* (HEA, 2022), lecturers should adopt inclusive approaches to teaching and learning that reflect the diversity of the student population. To encourage this necessary shift, lecturers should be supported in accessing professional development opportunities such as the UDL Badge and allocated sufficient time to redesign course materials and assessment methods in line with inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, given the specific needs of deaf students who are supported by interpreters, additional training is essential. This training should address key areas such as pace of delivery, communication etiquette, visual accessibility and how to collaborate with a second professional in the classroom, namely, the interpreter. While local delivery of this training would be ideal to ensure contextual relevance, the specialised expertise required and the existing demands on the DSS (AHEAD, 2025a) raise the question of feasibility. Therefore, consideration should be given to the development of an online training programme that could meet demands across all HEIs and ensure consistent standards. Appendix O illustrates a possible format for the web-based training programme.

3. Establish an ethical framework and training programme for educational interpreters.

A tailored ethical framework should be developed to support collaboration among educational interpreters while safeguarding confidentiality. Since interpreters often work in

rotation, secure communication channels are essential for sharing subject-specific vocabulary, logistical updates, and other relevant arrangements. The framework should provide clear guidance on consent-based information sharing and professional boundaries, helping interpreters, especially newer ones, navigate the complexities of educational interpreting and address concerns confidently. This would promote consistent, student-centred support and reduce the risk of fragmented experiences.

In addition, a comprehensive training programme should be developed and delivered regularly to ensure interpreters are equipped to meet the ethical, linguistic, and pedagogical challenges present in HE settings. This training should include modules on applying the ethical framework, ethical decision-making, managing boundaries, and practical strategies for collaboration. It should also cover subject-specific vocabulary preparation, incorporating resources such as the ISL STEM glossary (DCU, 2019), linguistic strategies, and educational nuances that influence interpretation, such as teaching styles and classroom environments. This training would contribute to, and be recognised as, continuous professional development hours required for interpreters to maintain their status on RISLI (RISLI, n.d.-c).

4. Formalise communication channels between all three stakeholders.

To foster relationship building and collaboration, clear and structured communication channels should be established between all three stakeholders. This may include a brief introductory or orientation meeting to discuss expectations and relevant logistical arrangements, such as positioning and how interpreters will receive preparatory materials. This meeting also provides an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure the deaf student is actively involved in these conversations. Scheduled check-ins or touchpoints provide the space to express concerns and reflect on what could be improved going forward.

6.3.2 Meso Level – Support Services and Institutional Policy

5. Strengthen coordination of holistic access supports for deaf students.

The DSS plays a key role in supporting SWD and ensuring HEI staff are informed to provide appropriate support (McCarthy et al., 2018). However, there is evidence that information regarding the needs of deaf students is not consistently communicated to the appropriate stakeholders, leaving them at risk of inadequate support. To address this, each DSS should tailor and expand the existing guidelines by AHEAD and DAWN (2018) to clearly define the roles of the DSS, lecturers, interpreters, and students for their respective HEIs. These

guidelines should be shared with all stakeholders prior to the academic year and include mechanisms for feedback. Interpreters should also be supported to engage in necessary preparation briefings where appropriate. A regular review of supports should be carried out to ensure they remain effective and appropriate to the individual needs of deaf students, taking a holistic approach. Furthermore, in situations where interpreters are unavailable, the DSS should ensure alternative supports are put in place to enable deaf students to participate in class.

6. Embed and foster an inclusive campus culture.

HEIs must take proactive and sustained action to cultivate a campus culture that is inclusive of all SWD, including deaf students, aligning with the *National Access Plan* (HEA, 2022) and the recently launched *ALTITUDE Charter* (AHEAD, 2024a; Banks et al., 2024). This begins with supporting academic staff in adopting inclusive teaching practices and to collaborate effectively with support professionals, such as interpreters, within the classroom. Inclusion must also extend beyond the classroom. Offering ISL classes can promote peer-to-peer communication, strengthen relationships, and foster a deeper sense of belonging among students. Furthermore, HEIs should develop and implement comprehensive guidelines to ensure all academic and extracurricular activities are inclusive and accessible, enabling deaf students to participate meaningfully in every aspect of campus life.

6.3.3 Macro Level – Interpreting Bodies and Policymakers

7. Increase investment for ISL interpreting supports.

The FSD has played a vital role in enabling access to HE for deaf students, however it has become increasingly precarious in recent years (AHEAD, 2025a). In addition, the pay disparity between educational interpreting and industry standard rates has been raised as a concern and misaligned with the skills required (McEvoy & IDS, 2025). A reassessment of the FSD and delivery models is needed to ensure sustainability, consistency, and quality. One potential approach, successfully implemented in some HEIs, is the direct employment of interpreters by HEIs, linked to the enrolment of deaf students. In practice, this may involve allocating a minimum of two whole-time equivalent interpreter posts per deaf student, either rotated or shared among interpreters. This model can improve service quality by enabling better integration into the academic environment, clearer expectations, foster stronger collaboration and allows HEIs to tailor the role and extend interpreting services beyond the classroom.

While this model may not be entirely feasible, the scope of the FSD should be reviewed and expanded to include: (a) interpreting supports during non-academic contact hours, (b) facilitation of co-interpreting arrangements, (c) a reassessment of interpreter remuneration structures, and (d) recognition of additional time required for pre-class preparation and post-class debriefing. These measures are essential to ensure sustainability, fairness, quality in interpreting provision, and that deaf students receive comprehensive support across all aspects of campus life, fostering a greater sense of belonging.

8. Expand ISL lexical resources and standardise interpreter deployment practices.

Established ISL lexicons, such as the ISL STEM glossary (DCU, 2019), are valuable and should be integrated into the existing interpreting training curriculum at the CDS. However, there is a clear need to continue expanding ISL lexicons across a broader range of academic disciplines to address ongoing gaps in subject-specific vocabulary. Establishing working groups that bring together deaf students, graduates, interpreters, and relevant experts to share, document, and validate existing ISL signs that have been created would help consolidate this knowledge. Making these resources accessible to both interpreters and students would support greater consistency, reduce cognitive load, and enhance the overall quality of interpretation in HE settings.

Given the demands of the role, interpreter deployments in HE settings should be reserved for those with a minimum level of interpreting experience. However, due to current interpreter shortages, this may not always be practical. Therefore, minimum standards for co-interpreting should be established, aligning with the earlier recommendation to expand the FSD. This would ensure that newly qualified interpreters are paired with experienced colleagues to facilitate mentoring and professional growth (Venturi, 2020). Agencies have a key role to play in facilitating this support. Finally, promoting consistency in interpreter assignments within HE will help foster stronger relationships and continuity for students.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers rich insights into the lived experiences of deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers in Irish HE settings, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, this study focused exclusively on HE settings, excluding other settings such as further education and vocational training, where educational interpreting also occurs. While this

allowed for deeper exploration and comparisons of HE-specific dynamics, it limits the scope of applicability across the broader education landscape.

Second, the small-scale nature of the sample and sampling methods employed within this study mean that the findings reflect a specific group of participants who were willing and available to engage. Notably, many of the lecturers demonstrated heightened awareness and motivation to support students from diverse backgrounds, likely influenced by the nature of the courses they teach and their openness to participating in this study. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalised to the wider HE population.

Thirdly, as participants reflected on their own experiences and interactions with other stakeholders, those others were not present to corroborate or respond to these accounts. This limits the ability to fully capture the complexity of those interactions. Finally, as the study took place during a period of shifting national policy and given that some participants were not actively studying or working in HE, their experiences may somewhat reflect past practices rather than current ones.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

There are several avenues for future research that could deepen our understanding of inclusive education for deaf students. One area worth exploring is the experiences of stakeholders in educational settings beyond HE. This could provide valuable comparisons and help identify the unique challenges and opportunities present in different environments, such as pre-tertiary settings and vocational education.

Another important focus is the pivotal transition periods for deaf students. Longitudinal research could offer insights into how transitions into postsecondary education are navigated, how social inclusion occurs, and how students access support services, including how these supports evolve over time. Notably, this study uncovered unexpected challenges related to notetakers, highlighting the need to further explore their role alongside other support personnel, including the DSS. Such research could offer deeper insight into how institutional practices influence the experiences of deaf students in HE. Additionally, comparative studies examining academic outcomes in co-enrolment contexts versus single student contexts could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these approaches.

Educational interpreting in the Irish context also warrants further investigation. Areas of focus could include interpreter readiness and competence, as well as observational studies of

linguistic decisions and strategies used in the classroom. Further analysis is needed to understand how educational interpreting impacts deaf students' comprehension and whether this has a measurable impact on their overall academic attainment.

Finally, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the deaf student-lecturer relationship. Research involving lecturers across a range of institutions and disciplines could enhance the generalisability and provide deeper insight into how deaf students are supported and engaged in the classroom. Extensions of this research could include other diverse learners to offer comparisons in identifying shared barriers or highlighting the distinct challenges faced by deaf students. These studies could also evaluate the implementation and impact of inclusive frameworks such as UDL, and how they influence pedagogical practices in ways that meaningfully engage both deaf learners and diverse learners, offering a broader understanding of inclusive education.

6.6 Final Reflections

This study has illuminated the nuanced realities of inclusion for deaf students in HE, revealing that the provision of access supports alone is not enough. True inclusion is a multifaceted process, relational, contextually situated, and deeply dependent on the attitudes, awareness, and collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders within the learning environment.

Deaf students navigate a landscape that not only demands academic engagement but also continuous self-advocacy and emotional resilience. Interpreters face conflicting demands from multiple stakeholders, acting simultaneously as advocates, language facilitators, and cultural mediators. Lecturers, meanwhile, must accommodate an increasingly diverse student population often within varied teaching contexts shaped by factors such as classroom size and nature of the subject. Collaborating with interpreters adds a layer of coordination, requiring flexibility in teaching and responsiveness in pedagogical practice.

The lived experiences of deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers demonstrate that while progress is being made, systemic gaps remain. Inclusion must be understood as a dynamic process that requires ongoing reflection, adaptation, and commitment at every level of the HE system. As Ireland continues to advance its inclusive HE agenda, this research which focuses on deaf students, contributes to the expanding body of evidence advocating for a more equitable approach to supporting a diverse student population.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Literature Review Search Strings

Table A1

Literature Review Main Search Strings

Number	Concepts	Search String
1	Main	“sign language interpret*” AND “higher education” AND “relationship” AND “deaf student” AND “teacher”
2	C1 – C5	“sign language interpret*” AND (“higher education” OR “university” OR “college” OR “third level education” OR “tertiary education” OR “academi*” OR “post secondary” OR “post-secondary”) AND (“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship”) AND (“deaf student” OR “hearing impaired student” OR “hearing-impaired student” OR “hard of hearing student” OR “hard-of-hearing student” OR “sign language user*”) AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)
3	C1 – C4	“sign language interpret*” AND (“higher education” OR “university” OR “college” OR “third level education” OR “tertiary education” OR “academi*” OR “post secondary” OR “post-secondary”) AND (“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship”) AND (“deaf student” OR “hearing impaired student” OR “hearing-impaired student” OR “hard of hearing student” OR “hard-of-hearing student” OR “sign language user*”)
4	C1+C2+C4+C5	“sign language interpret*” AND (“higher education” OR “university” OR “college” OR “third level education” OR “tertiary education” OR “academi*” OR “post secondary” OR “post-secondary”) AND (“deaf student” OR “hearing impaired student” OR “hearing-impaired student” OR “hard of hearing student” OR “hard-of-hearing student” OR “sign language user*”) AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)
5	C1+C2+C3+C5	“sign language interpret*”

AND (“higher education” OR “university” OR “college” OR “third level education” OR “tertiary education” OR “academi*” OR “post secondary” OR “post-secondary”)
AND (“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship”)
AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)
6 C1+C3+C4+C5 “sign language interpret*”
AND (“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship”)
AND (“deaf student” OR “hearing impaired student” OR “hearing-impaired student” OR “hard of hearing student” OR “hard-of-hearing student” OR “sign language user*”)
AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)

Table A2*Deaf Student-Lecturer Relationship Search String*

Number	Concepts	Search String
1	Main	“relationship” AND “deaf student” AND “lecturer”
2	C1 – C3	“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship” OR “interact*” AND (“deaf student” OR “hearing impaired student” OR “hearing-impaired student” OR “hard of hearing student” OR “hard-of-hearing student” OR “sign language user*”) AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)

Table A3*Student-Lecturer Relationship Search String*

Number	Concepts	Search String
1	Main	“relationship” AND “student” AND “lecturer”
2	C1 – C3	“relationship” OR “dynamic” OR “tr#ad” OR “rapport” OR “working relationship” OR “interact* OR collaborat*” AND “student” AND (“academic” OR “teacher” OR “lecturer” OR “tutor” OR “instructor” OR “educator” OR “professor”)
3	New Search	“relationship” AND “lecturer-student”

Appendix B

Literature Review Database Record Tracker

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
Database Name >>>	Academic Search Complete			Education Research Complete (ERC)			ERIC International			Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA)			JSTOR			SCOPUS			Pathways to Irish Research (RIAN)			Result Yielded with no limiters	Last Refined Search Results Yielded
Search String Used	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance	Variation	Number	Relevance		
1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	8	2	1	1	0	1	27	9	1	0	0	36	36
2	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	88		2	0	0	2	1	1	2	89		178	
3	3	4	0	3	0	0	3	1	0	2.1	56		3	33	3	3	2	2	2.1	60		136	117
4	4	9	4	4	4	3	4	1	0	3	96		4	0	0	4	22	7				150	69
5	5	5	2	5	5	2	5	6	3	3.1	29	3	4	114		5	60					309	71
6	6	0	0	6	0	0	6	0	0	4.1	35	4	5	231		5.1	74	8	5.1	56	1	89	148
										6	88		6	0	0	6	1	1				89	29
										6.1	28	7											
TOTAL		18			9			8			230			89			55			60	0	898	469
Number after duplicates removed		18			9			8			123			65			48			58			329
Number after initial screening		10			3			4			26			20			28			21			112
Number after removing books, theses, non-English, articles relating to healthcare or legal settings,		2			2			2			9			8			11			3			37
Number after removing articles unable to be retrieved or duplicates		1			2			0			9			7			9			3			31
Number of relevant articles with score of 1 to 3		0			2			0			6			4			6			1			19
Number of relevant articles with score of 1 or 2		0			2			0			4			4			2			0			12

Note. This figure is my tracker relating to the systemised search carried out in November 2021, following the pilot search.

Appendix C

Critical Reading Form

The following is an adapted version of the critical reading form I received during a workshop titled “*Writing in the First Year*”, delivered by Dr. Dan Soule in December 2021. This tool was used to support the systematic reading and evaluation of literature in terms of its relevance to my study.

Critical Reading Form Questions

1. Authors, title, date, publication title, place of publication, [vol/issue: pp. if a journal paper], type of copy I have (e.g. paper, PDF, notes)
2. What are the main findings of this work? (Reference other researchers. Also, you may disagree with the authors)
3. Were there any secondary findings?
4. What gap in our understanding does this work fill? (Mention specific papers/researchers)
5. What is the research tradition/approach/method used? (Reference other researchers)
6. What are the limitations of this work? (Mention specific papers/researchers)
7. What didn't I understand?
8. Is there anything else that is relevant to comment on?
9. How is this work relevant to your assignment?
10. How is it connected to previous studies?
11. How is it connected to derivative studies?

Relevance Score

1. Very useful, return to for more detailed analysis
2. Useful and of general importance
3. Relevant but of minor importance
4. Not relevant

Appendix D

Literature Review Selection Process

I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
Abstract	Theme 1 - Educational Interpreting	Theme 2 - Relationships & Experiences	Theme 3 - Best Practices & Experiences	Sub Themes	Sub Themes	Sub Themes	Sub Themes	Main findings	Secondary findings	Research Applications	What research	Limitations	What didn't	Any other comments	Useful and original	
The roles of interpreters in an inclusive education for deaf students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Interpreter Experience	Teacher-Interpreter Relationship	Access in Classroom	Academic Vocabulary	This study identified the roles of interpreters in an inclusive education for deaf students	This study also discussed the roles of interpreters in an inclusive education for deaf students	This research was based on a qualitative analysis of the experiences of interpreters in an inclusive education for deaf students	As this study is the first to explore the roles of interpreters in an inclusive education for deaf students	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this article, I learned that interpreters play a crucial role in the education of deaf students	There were no other comments	1	
Deaf academics who navigate aspects of their academic experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Academic - Deaf Identity	Academic Vocabulary	Tips for Inclusion	Academic Vocabulary	This paper presented the experiences of deaf academics in higher education	The paper discussed the challenges deaf academics face in higher education	The authors of this paper added to the understanding of the experiences of deaf academics in higher education	This paper was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf academics in higher education	I am still unclear about the specific challenges deaf academics face in higher education	There were no other comments	1		
This article is based on thesis research	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Tips for Inclusion	Tips for Inclusion	This study looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This study highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	The study highlighted the importance of providing support for deaf students in higher education	1	
[This paper provides an examination of the experiences of deaf students in higher education]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Academic Vocabulary	Tips for Inclusion	This study highlighted the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Participants within this study shared their experiences of deaf students in higher education	This was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	I understood that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This study only focused on the experiences of deaf students in higher education	1	
This paper provides an examination of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Academic Vocabulary	Tips for Inclusion	This study highlighted the experiences of deaf students in higher education	In this research, based on the qualitative analysis, deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This study took a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This study looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This study represented the experiences of deaf students in higher education	1	
The present study examined the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Interpreter Experience	Tips for Inclusion	Academic Vocabulary	Tips for Inclusion	This study was to examine the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Some of the recommendations from this study were to provide more support for deaf students in higher education	This study identified the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This research is a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	No other comments	2	
In Brazil, work with Brazilian sign language	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Interpreter Experience	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Classroom Comprehension	LIBRAS was recognised as the official language of Brazil	Students did not have access to LIBRAS in their classrooms	Two questions were asked: How do deaf students experience higher education in Brazil? What are the challenges they face?	This study does not have a large sample size	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	As I had to use Google Translate, I am still unclear about some of the details	No other comments	2	
[Four experiments investigated classroom comprehension]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Classroom Comprehension	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Academic Vocabulary	This research mainly looked at classroom comprehension for deaf students	They found that deaf students have lower classroom comprehension scores than hearing students	The researcher identified the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study investigated the classroom comprehension of deaf students	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	In all experiments, deaf students performed worse than hearing students	2	
[Despite the importance of sign language, remarkably few studies have examined our education]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Classroom Comprehension	Academic Vocabulary	Classroom Comprehension	This research looked at classroom comprehension for deaf students	This study also looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	I believe that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	It discussed the importance of providing support for deaf students in higher education	2	
Remarkably few studies have examined our education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Classroom Comprehension	Academic Vocabulary	Classroom Comprehension	Classroom Comprehension	This study refers to previous research that found that deaf students have lower classroom comprehension scores	It was found that there were no significant differences in classroom comprehension scores between deaf and hearing students	In experiment 1, deaf students performed worse than hearing students	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The authors refer to previous research that found that deaf students have lower classroom comprehension scores	N/A	None	2	
urting Our Education": Toward a Re-examination of the Role of Interpreters in Higher Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Academic - Student-Interpreter Relationship	Classroom Comprehension	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Classroom Comprehension	This article is not a study but rather a reflective piece on the role of interpreters in higher education	This was not a quantitative study but rather a reflective piece on the role of interpreters in higher education	This study is a qualitative study that explored the role of interpreters in higher education	This was one of the main findings of the study	From reading this article, I learned that interpreters play a crucial role in the education of deaf students	The author mentions that interpreters play a crucial role in the education of deaf students	2		
THE STUDY examined the extent to which deaf students are attending mainstream educational policy in the United States	Yes	Yes	Yes	Classroom Comprehension	Interpreter Experience	Student-Interpreter Relationship	Classroom Comprehension	In this study, the researchers examined the extent to which deaf students are attending mainstream educational policy in the United States	In the qualitative analysis, it was found that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study only focused on the experiences of deaf students in higher education	I felt that the research was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This paper has a small sample size	3		
Deaf students are attending mainstream educational policy in the United States	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Student-Teacher Relationship	Classroom Comprehension	Academic Vocabulary	This research looked at the extent to which deaf students are attending mainstream educational policy in the United States	Direct communication from primary research highlights the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This research was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This was a qualitative study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	None	No	3		
Educational policy in the United States	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Classroom	This study looked at the extent to which deaf students are attending mainstream educational policy in the United States	The authors discussed the challenges deaf students face in higher education	There was no research that specifically looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research discusses the overall experiences of deaf students in higher education	It was specific to the US	There was no other comments	3		
The population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Tips for Inclusion	Access in Classroom	Student-Teacher Relationship	This study looked at the population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing	The second theme was the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study took a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The study specifically looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this research, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	I was interested in the experiences of deaf students in higher education	3	
The Sign Language Interpreter is a Professional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Interpreter Experience	Tips for Inclusion	Access in Classroom	Student-Teacher Relationship	This research identified the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The authors used a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This is the experience of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	I used Google Translate to read the article	N/A	N/A	3	
This article is excerpted from Jokin et al. (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Academic - Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	This was not a research paper but rather a qualitative analysis of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The author provides a clear analysis of the challenges deaf students face in higher education	Unsure about the specific challenges deaf students face in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	None	N/A	3		
Deaf individuals are disproportionately represented in higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Academic Vocabulary	Interpreter Experience	Access in Classroom	Classroom Comprehension	In this study, three main themes were identified: the challenges deaf students face in higher education, the role of interpreters in higher education, and the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This study outlined the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This study took a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This study informed the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Participants were interviewed about their experiences of deaf students in higher education	From reading this article, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	This study solely focused on the experiences of deaf students in higher education	3	
[Sign language interpreters working in higher education]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Academic Vocabulary	Interpreter Experience	Access in Classroom	Classroom Comprehension	This research looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	As this article was from a qualitative study, it provided a detailed account of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	At the time of the study, the researchers only looked at 32 out of the 33 deaf students in the sample	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	I found it pretty 32 out of the 33 deaf students in the sample	4		
[THE ARTICLE EXPLORES sign language interpreters working in higher education]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Interpreter Training	Access in Classroom	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	This paper did a comparison of Australia, UK and the US	A comparative analysis of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	At the time, it was only looked at 3 countries - all English speaking countries	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	None	N/A	4		
[FOR MORE THAN 20 years, two countries have been deaf or hard of hearing]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Access in Classroom	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Higher Education	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	None	4	
STUDENTS WHO ARE deaf or hard of hearing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Classroom	Collaborative Learning	Collaborative Learning	This was not a research paper but rather a qualitative analysis of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The researcher identified the challenges deaf students face in higher education	Eleven deaf students were interviewed about their experiences of deaf students in higher education	This research highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this research, I learned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	I was interested in the experiences of deaf students in higher education	4	
This paper reports a study carried out in higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Classroom	Classroom Comprehension	Classroom Comprehension	This research study looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Some of the participants in the study were deaf students	The author emphasized the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study described the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	The author refers to previous research that found that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	4		
Historically, the valuing of deaf children and young people	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Classroom	This was not a research paper but rather a qualitative analysis of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	
Research reveals that there is a lack of understanding of deaf children and young people	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Identity	Access in Classroom	Access in Higher Education	Access in Higher Education	This author describes the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The author discusses the experiences of deaf students in higher education	This author emphasized the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study described the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	The discussion highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	4		
This autoethnography presents a narrative of the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Access in Classroom	Tips for Inclusion	Access in Higher Education	Access in Higher Education	This was a hypothetical study that explored the experiences of deaf students in higher education	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	
Scientists are shaped by their unique experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Classroom	This study highlighted the experiences of deaf students in higher education	Respondents highlighted the challenges deaf students face in higher education	The researcher emphasized the challenges deaf students face in higher education	This study highlighted the experiences of deaf students in higher education	The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of diversity in the participants	From reading this research, the author mentioned that deaf students face many challenges in higher education	4		
This article is dedicated to the students of deaf education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Access in Higher Education	Access in Classroom	Access in Classroom	The relationship between thinking styles and deaf students in higher education	Experiment with 600+ deaf students	They didn't use professional sign language	Irrelevant	None	None	4		
Institutional integration plays a significant role in the education of deaf students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deaf Student Experience	Deaf Identity	Sign Language	Linguistics	This study looked at the experiences of deaf students in higher education	No other comments	Two groups were interviewed about their experiences of deaf students in higher education	This highlights the challenges deaf students face in higher education	It did not refer to any other research	None	4		

Note. This figure is an extract of my literature review screening procedure.

Appendix E

Research Ethics Committee Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Mr Caroline McGrotty
School of Inclusive and Special Education

16th January 2023

REC Reference: DCUREC/2022/234

Proposal Title: **Effective Working Relationships and Strategies for the Inclusion of Deaf Students in Higher Education**

Applicant(s): **Ms Caroline McGrotty, Dr Elizabeth Matthews, Dr Ann Marie Farrell**

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to expedited review, DCU REC is pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications is dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Melrona Kurrane'.

Dr. Melrona Kurrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

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Dublin 9, Ireland

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E research@dcu.ie
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Note: Please retain this approval letter for future publication purposes (for research students, this includes incorporating the letter within their thesis appendices).

Appendix F

Plain Language Statement

Introduction

My name is Caroline McGrotty, and I am a Master's by Research student in the School of Inclusive and Special Education in DCU. I am doing research into 'Effective Working Relationships and Strategies for Inclusion of Deaf Students in Higher Education' (draft title). My supervisors are Dr. Elizabeth Mathews and Ann Marie Farrell.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate what are the characteristics of an effective working relationship between the deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer. The study will also look at the differences when there is a critical mass of deaf students co-enrolled in the same course versus an individual deaf student studying in higher education. You have been invited to participate in this study as you may be a deaf student, interpreter, or a lecturer who has or had experience of the above.

Details of Involvement in the Research Study

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be required to be available for an interview that may take up to one hour. You will be asked to answer demographic questions such as how you identify, your years of experience working as an interpreter or lecturer, training that was provided in the past etc., prior to interview commencing to help gather a profile of all participants involved in the study. The interview will then start asking you to share your experience of working with students, interpreters, and lecturers in higher education.

Interviews will be at a date and time that suits you and can be done either face-to-face at a location of your choosing or online through Zoom. All interviews, both in-person or virtual, will be recorded via Zoom in order to facilitate data gathering and subsequent data analysis. The recording will not be used for any purpose other than for this research. You can take a break during the interview or completely withdraw without consequence.

Potential Benefits

You will have the opportunity to highlight your own personal experience and reflect on how the working relationship of a deaf student, interpreter, and lecturer could be improved on which

may benefit you directly or indirectly in the future. Also, by participating in this research, you may be contributing to inclusion for all deaf sign language students in higher education.

Potential Risks

There are no serious potential risks to you. However, depending on your experience, you may recount negative experiences or share uncomfortable feelings during the interview.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity are of the utmost importance in this study. Every effort will be made to respect your anonymity, which will include the use of pseudonyms, removing any identifying information such as names of people, agencies, and higher education institutions. However, as this research is focused on a specific area and most participants involved in the study will be from the Irish Deaf Community, it may be impossible to guarantee your anonymity. It is also important to note that confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim, or mandated reporting by some professions.

Voluntary Involvement

Involvement within this research project is purely voluntary and you are not obliged to participate in this research if you have a personal relationship with me. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequence. If you withdraw before the study is complete, your data will be destroyed and not be used within the research, however, once the thesis is completed, it will not be possible to remove your data from the thesis.

Additional Information

- Your involvement or non-involvement in this research project will in no way affect any ongoing relationship with Dublin City University, if there is any.
- I am in receipt of a stipend from PATH 1 funding by the Higher Education Authority.
- Findings from this research will be disseminated to research participants at various conferences, publications, and journal, etc.

Privacy Notice

- The Data Controller is DCU. The data processed will consist of participants' informed consent forms, demographic questionnaires, interview recordings, and transcripts, which may carry both personal and special categories of data under GDPR.

- Interview recordings may be given to a professional third-party transcription service for the sole purpose of transcribing the data to written English. Recordings will be destroyed once transcription has been completed.
- Identifiable interview transcripts will be destroyed after anonymisation.
- Anonymised transcripts will be retained indefinitely.
- Emails, identifiers, and informed consent forms will be expunged 1 year upon completion of the postgraduate thesis.
- All data will be password protected and securely stored in DCU's Google Drive online folder.
- You have the right to request your data at any stage by contacting me, Caroline McGrotty or alternatively, by contacting DCU's Data Protection Unit data.protection@dcu.ie.
- The study will be conducted in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and if you have any concerns regarding how your data in this study has been handled, you can contact: DCU Data Protection Officer, Mr. Martin Ward – (data.protection@dcu.ie Tel: 01-7005118/01- 7008257) who will handle any data protection concerns arising from this research. An individual also has the right to report a complaint concerning the use of personal data to the Irish Data Protection Commission: Data Protection Commissioner.

If you have any queries or doubts about the nature of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at caroline.mcgroty2@mail.dcu.ie. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Elizabeth Mathews elizabeth.mathews@dcu.ie or Ann Marie Farrell annmarie.farrell@dcu.ie.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel. 01-7008000. E-mail: rec@dcu.ie.

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form

I, _____, declare that I agree to participate in the interview as part of the research study entitled '*Effective Working Relationships and Strategies for Inclusion of Deaf Students in Higher Education*', conducted by Caroline McGrotty, a Master's by Research Student with the School of Inclusive and Special Education in DCU under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Mathews and Ann Marie Farrell.

Please circle or highlight Yes or No for each statement:

I have read/watched the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes / No
I understand the information provided and the nature of the study	Yes / No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	Yes / No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes / No
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	Yes / No
I understand that I am not obliged to participate in this study	Yes / No
I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time	Yes / No
I am aware that my interview will be recorded	Yes / No
I understand how the information gathered will be used and stored	Yes / No
I understand that all data and experiences gathered will remain anonymous	Yes / No
I agree for my anonymised data to be used in Caroline McGrotty's thesis	Yes / No
I agree for my anonymised data to be used in future presentation of the findings	Yes / No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H

ISL Translations of Research Documents

ISL translations of the Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Form documents were provided to all participants, supplementing the written documents. On account of its length, the Plain Language Statement was delivered in two videos.

Figure H1

Plain Language Statement in ISL

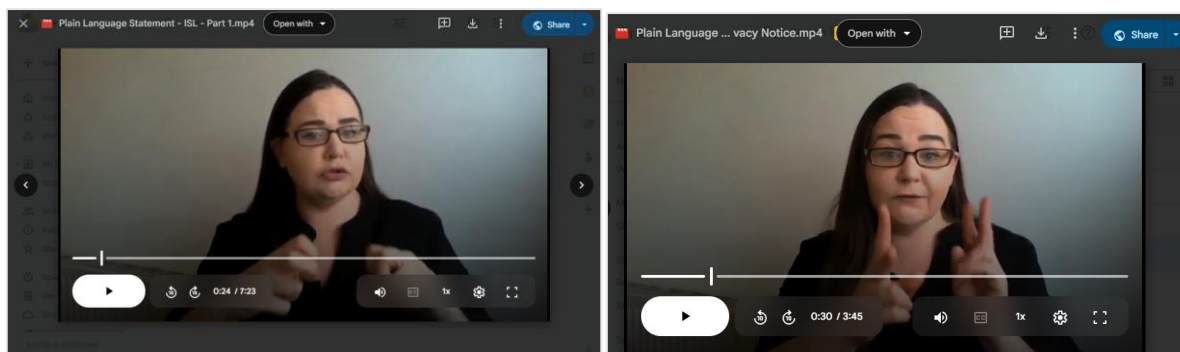
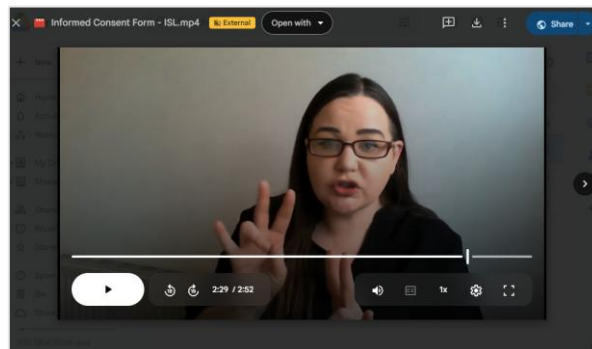


Figure H2

Informed Consent Form in ISL



Appendix I

Participant Demographic Questionnaires

Deaf Students

Table I1

Deaf Students' Demographic Questions

Question	Response Options
1. What subject area did you study?	[open-ended]
2. How many years of higher education did you attend with having ISL interpreting support?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 year ▪ 2-4 years ▪ 5 years or more
3. What was the most recent year you had ISL interpreting support in higher education?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Currently a student ▪ 2019 – 2022 ▪ 2015 – 2018 ▪ 2011 – 2014 ▪ Prior to 2011
4. Did you have a sign language interpreter in primary or secondary school or any other educational settings prior to attending higher education?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No
5. Please tick which of the below you most identify with.	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Native signer (signing as main language and use ISL interpreters to access services) ▪ Bilingual (use a mixture of speaking and signing in equally in daily life and use ISL interpreters to access services) ▪ Oral (speaking as main language and only use ISL interpreters to access services)
6. Have you experienced the following higher education settings?	[tick all that apply]

- a) Being a single deaf student on a mainstream course
- b) Co-enrolled group of deaf students on a mainstream course
- c) Group of deaf students on a course specifically for deaf people

If yes to 6a: Were you the only deaf student who used ISL interpreters on campus that you were aware of? [select one]

- Yes
- No

If yes to 6b:

How many deaf students were on your course? [open-ended]

Do you know of any other deaf students who used ISL interpreters on campus (not part of your course) that you were aware of?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If yes to 6c: How many deaf students were on your course? [open-ended]

Interpreters

Table I2

Interpreters' Demographic Questions

Question	Response Options
1. How long have you worked as a qualified interpreter	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0-4 years ▪ 5-9 years ▪ 10-14 years ▪ 15+ years
2. How long after you qualified did you start working in higher education settings?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within a year after graduating ▪ 1 year ▪ 2 years ▪ 3 years or more
3. Have you interpreted in primary or secondary settings?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No
4. Did you receive training about interpreting in educational settings as part of your initial qualification?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No ▪ Can't remember
<i>If Yes to the above, did you feel this training was adequate?</i>	[Likert Scale]
5. Have you completed any formal CPD or training in working and/or interpreting in educational settings post-qualification?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No ▪ Informally (through engaging with other interpreters or reading articles) ▪ Received both formal and informal training.
<i>If Yes to the above, did you feel this training was of benefit?</i>	[Likert Scale]
6. Have you experience of interpreting in the following higher education settings?	[tick all that apply] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Single deaf student on a mainstream course

- b) Co-enrolled group of deaf students on a mainstream course
 - c) Group of deaf students on a course specifically for deaf people
-

Lecturers

Table I3

Lecturers' Demographic Questions

Question	Response Options
1. How long have you worked as a lecturer?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0-4 years ▪ 5-9 years ▪ 10-14 years ▪ 15+ years
2. Do you have any formal teaching qualifications?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No
3. Have you ever received formal training in supporting students with disabilities in a classroom setting?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No ▪ Can't remember ▪ Informally (through engaging with support services or reading materials)
<i>If Yes to the above, did you feel this training was adequate?</i>	[Likert Scale]
4. Have you ever received formal training in supporting deaf students in the classroom?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No ▪ Can't remember ▪ Informally (through engaging with support services or reading materials)
<i>If Yes to the above, did you feel this training was of benefit?</i>	[Likert Scale]
5. Have you ever received formal training in working with interpreters in educational settings?	[select one] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No ▪ Can't remember ▪ Informally (through engaging with support services or reading materials)
<i>If Yes to the above, did you feel this training was of benefit?</i>	[Likert Scale]

6. Have you experience of teaching deaf students in the following higher education settings?

[tick all that apply]

- a) Single deaf student on a mainstream course
- b) Co-enrolled group of deaf students on a mainstream course
- c) Group of deaf students on a course specifically for deaf people

If yes to 6a: How many times have you had a single deaf student in your classroom?

[select one]

- Just one time with one deaf student
- Up to 3 times i.e. up to 3 deaf students
- More than 3 times i.e. more than 3 deaf students

If yes to 6b: How many times have you had a co-enrolled group of deaf students on a mainstream course

[select one]

- Just one time
- Up to 3 different mainstream co-enrolled deaf groups
- More than 3 mainstream co-enrolled deaf groups

If yes to 6c: How many times have you had a group of deaf students on a course specifically for deaf people?

[select one]

- Just one time
 - Up to 3 different deaf groups
 - More than 3 deaf groups.
-

Appendix J

Participant Interview Questions

Deaf Students

1. **Did you have interpreters for all modules?** *Did you receive any other supports?*
2. **What do you think the role of an educational interpreter is?**
 - *Did you have ever have a discussion with the lecturer about the interpreter's role?*
 - *Did you have ever a discussion with the support services about the interpreter's role?*
 - *Did you ever have a discussion with the interpreter about their role?*
3. **What do you think the lecturer's role is in the classroom?**
4. **Did you ever discuss how you would work with the interpreter?**
5. **Did you ever discuss with the lecturer about the interpreter's role?** *Are you aware of any discussion that might have taken place?*
6. **What do you think is important to ensure an effective working relationship between you, the interpreter, and the lecturer?**
 - *Can you give me an example of how you worked with the interpreter and/or lecturer to improve on the working relationship?*
7. **What do you think is meant by effective interpreting?**
8. **Do you feel you get a full interpretation of everything within the classroom environment?**
 - *Can you give me an example of a time where you felt there was effective interpreting?*
 - *Can you tell me about a time where you feel you did not get an effective interpretation of what was happening within the classroom? What do you think could have been done in this instance?*

Additional Questions for Co-enrolled Students

9. *What is the relationship like between you, the interpreter(s) and lecturer?*

10. *Can you tell me what the difference might have been if you were the only deaf student on the course?*
11. *Do you think the lecturer approach their teaching style different as a result of having more than one deaf student?*
12. *As a result of your experience, do you feel you were motivated and actively participated within the classroom?*

Additional Questions for Single Students

13. *What is the relationship like between you, the interpreter(s) and lecturer?*
14. *Do you think the lecturer approached their style differently as a result of you in the classroom?*
15. *Do you think it would have been different if there was more than one deaf student on your course?*
16. *As a result of your experience, do you feel you were motivated and actively participated within the classroom?*

Interpreters

1. **What do you think the role of an educational interpreter is?** *Are there any aspects you feel should not be part of your role?*
2. **Did you ever discuss your role with:**
 - the deaf student? *If no, were you aware of any discussion taking place?*
 - the lecturers? *If no, were you aware of any discussion taking place?*
 - the support services?
3. **What do you think the role of the lecturer is in the relationship?**
4. **What do you think the deaf student's role is in the relationship?**

5. **What do you think is important in ensuring an effective working relationship between you, the interpreter, and the lecturer?** *Can you give me an example of a time where this might have occurred?*

6. **What do you think is meant by the term ‘effective interpreting’?**

- *Do you feel you are able to interpret everything within the classroom environment?*
- *Can you tell me about a time where you felt you may not have achieved effective interpreting and the reasons why?*

7. **Did you have co-interpreters working alongside you?**

- *If yes, how did you manage this?*
- *If no, and you only had interpreters switching different lectures, did you ever come together to discuss the deaf student or the course materials?*

8. **Did you interpret outside the educational classroom?**

9. **What is the biggest challenge you face as an educational interpreter in higher education?**

Additional Questions for Co-enrolled Groups

10. *How was your relationship with the lecturer in this instance?*

11. *Do you think the lecturer approached their teaching style differently with a bigger group of deaf students?*

12. *Do you think the deaf students were active participants within the classroom? Do you think it might have been different if there was only one student?*

13. *Was your interpreter role perceived differently when there were a group of deaf students?*

14. *What was interpreting like when doing group work or project discussions with other hearing students if any?*

Additional Questions for Single Students

15. *What is the relationship like between the deaf student, you and lecturer typically?*

16. *Do you think the lecturer approached their teaching style any different because there was a deaf student in the class? Do you think they think they might have done different if there were more than one deaf student?*

17. *Do you think the deaf student was an active participant within the classroom? Do you think it might have been different if there were more than one student?*
18. *What strategies did you use when navigating classroom discussions?*
19. *What was interpreting like when doing group work or project discussions?*

Lecturers

1. What do you believe to be the role of an educational interpreter?

- *Did you ever have a discussion with the interpreters about their role?*
- *Did you ever discuss with the deaf students about the interpreter's role?*
- *Did you ever discuss the role with the support services in college?*

2. What do you think the role of the deaf student is in the classroom? Is it any different from other students within the classroom?

3. What do you think is important to ensure an effective working relationship between you, the interpreter and the student? Do you have any examples of this?

4. What do you think is meant by effective interpreting? Do you have any examples of this?

5. Did you adopt any changes to your teaching style as a result of having deaf students?

- *What type of changes did you make, or did you become aware of if any?*
- *Were there any other accommodations that were put in place aside from the ISL interpreter?*

Additional Questions for Co-enrolled Students

6. *How did you approach teaching a larger number of deaf students? Did the relationship you have change with the students/interpreters?*
7. *Do you think the deaf students were active participants within the classroom? Do you think it might have been different if they were the only deaf student in the classroom?*
8. *What was the relationship like between the deaf students and the interpreter?*
9. *What strategies did you use when navigating group work/classroom discussions?*

Additional Questions for Single Students

10. *Do you think the deaf student was an active participant within the classroom? Do you think it might have been different if there were other deaf students in the classroom?*
11. *What was the relationship like between the deaf student and the interpreter?*
12. *What was the relationship like between you and the deaf student? Did you meet with the deaf student without an interpreter?*
13. *What strategies did you use when navigating group work/classroom discussion?*

Appendix K

Social Media Adverts

Figure J1

LinkedIn Post

Call for Lecturers
Seeking Research Participants

Eligibility Criteria

- Experience lecturing in higher education settings in Ireland
- Experience of having a single deaf student and sign language interpreters in your classroom

Commitment Required

- One-to-one interview
- Approx. 30-45 minutes
- Either face-to-face or online

Research Topic
Exploring effective working relationships and strategies for inclusion of deaf students in higher education

For more information, please email caroline.mcgroddy2@mail.dcu.ie

Caroline McGroddy (She/Her) · You
Accessibility Specialist / Access Officer with ES...
1mo · Edited · 🌐

Now into my final year of my part-time Masters by Research with [Dublin City University](#), I am looking for lecturers working in [#HigherEducation](#) who may be interested in taking part in my research study. The topic is exploring working relationships and strategies for inclusion of [#DeafStudents](#) in higher education settings - particularly those who have experience of lecturing a single deaf student with [#SignLanguageInterpreters](#) in their classroom.

If you are interested, please get in touch here or via caroline.mcgroddy2@mail.dcu.ie. Please feel free to share this post with anyone you may think may be interested also.

[#Inclusion](#) [#Access](#) [#Research](#) [#DeafAccess](#) [#Interpreting](#) [#Lecturing](#) [#UDL](#)
ID included in Alt Text.

👍👍👍 57 11 comments · 22 reposts

👍 Like 🗨 Comment 🔄 Repost 📧 Send

📊 2,685 impressions [View analytics](#)

👤 Add a comment... 😊 📷

Most relevant ▾

1mo ...

Is this extended to countries like Australia? If so, I'd love to be a participant and can share and pass this onto

Figure J2

X Post

 **Caroline McGrotty**
@CarolineMcTweet

I am seeking lecturers working in higher education who have experience of having a deaf student and a sign language interpreter in their classroom to participate in my study below. If you are interested, please DM me and I will send you more information. Reposts appreciated 😊

Call for Lecturers

Seeking Research Participants

Eligibility Criteria

- Experience lecturing in higher education settings in Ireland
- Experience of having a single deaf student and sign language interpreters in your classroom

Commitment Required

- One-to-one interview
- Approx. 30-45 minutes
- Either face-to-face or online

Research Topic
Exploring effective working relationships and strategies for inclusion of deaf students in higher education

For more information, please email caroline.mcgrotty2@mail.dcu.ie

ALT



12:56 PM · Oct 12, 2024 · **5,861** Views

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Appendix L

Extract of Interview Transcripts

Below is an extract from the transcript of the interview conducted with Sophie in ISL, which was translated into written English. To mitigate the risk of losing contextual information such as non-verbal communication and signs that were difficult to translate into English, these were highlighted with asterisks and colour-coded.

Caroline: To follow up on the question earlier on effective interpreting, do you feel you get a full interpretation of everything within the classroom environment?

Sophie: ***shaking their head*** I was just too tired. I remember when I first started college, I got so overwhelmed, it was information overload. I just pretended to understand by showing a positive facial expression like this - ***mouths yes yes yes and nodding lightly*** - all the time.

Sophie: They made me realise that I could ask for clarification if I didn't understand...But at the same time, it wasn't their responsibility to 'teach' me, but whose is it? Deaf students probably don't know, and the interpreter tried their best by taking on more responsibility outside of their duty. So... ***signs a weighing up motion***

The next extract is from a transcript of the interview conducted with Issac, which was in spoken English. Issac shifted between modalities and used ISL in the absence of an English equivalent. These instances were noted in the transcript for contextual relevance.

Issac: I do think there's a big gap in education of young deaf people around the interpreter's role, why they're there because at the end of the day it's a big scary world, you know, you're coming in, you're the only deaf person, there's only one other person in that room that can sign with you and that's the interpreter. There's going to be a ***signs connection*** and I think there needs to be a bit of, I won't say friendship but there needs to be that trust. You know, you need to have that rapport and that, it's not to allow that to become too dependent.

Appendix M

Reflexive Thematic Analysis Coding Process

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Table M1 presents a comprehensive list of the initial codes generated through the analysis, each accompanied by a brief description. The 'Files' column indicates the number of datasets in which each code appeared, while 'References' denotes the total number of instances that were coded.

Table M1

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Name	Description	Files	References
Agreeing signs	Instances where student and interpreter agreed signs	13	28
Background knowledge of subject	Interpreter's background knowledge of the subject - have prior knowledge	15	45
Classroom Setup	Size of classes, positioning, logistics, etc.	18	57
Co-interpreters	Specific references to two interpreters working in a classroom	10	28
College Work Placement - Interpreters	References to interpreting on work placements	3	8
Complaints - Reporting	Reporting to Disability Office or RISLI over interpreters	6	17
Comprehension for Deaf Student	Full understanding of interpretation	15	41

Deaf co-enrolled group	specifically talking about more than one student - co-enrolled group	12	67
Deaf student additional work or preparation	Deaf students having to email lecturers - or interpreters or emailing disability office	16	44
Deaf student asking questions	Linked to question on active participation	20	62
Deaf student impressed with interpreter	Comments where students were impressed with interpreter - whether through their skills or generally attitude or motivation	4	9
Deaf students communicating with hearing students	Interactions with hearing students or communicating in group work	13	26
Deaf Students Experience in HE	Mixture of comments discussing students' experiences - both positive and negative	8	15
Deaf students feeling different from hearing students	Feelings typically relating to not feeling equal or being very aware they were deaf.	9	19
Deaf students lack motivation	self-motivation - not be more engaging - placing blame on interpreter	8	12
Deaf Students Learning from Deaf Peers	Learning from other deaf people about interpreters	12	17
dependency	Refers to either student dependency on lecturers or lectures dependent on students	6	9
Discussing with interpreters their role	majority linked to responses to 'did you ever discuss with interpreters about their role'	10	15
Discussion-Based Learning	Specific references to classroom discussion or workshop style classes	17	41
Discussion with lecturer about interpreter's role	Mostly linked to question responses on 'did you ever discuss with lecturer about interpreter role'	15	30
Discussion with students about intp role	Mostly linked to question responses on 'did you ever discuss with students about interpreter role'	12	19

Discussion with Support Service about interpreter's role	Mostly linked to question responses on 'did you ever discuss with support services about interpreter role'	18	29
Effective Interpreting	Relates to question on effective interpreting or has examples of effective interpreting	18	55
effective working relationship	linked to question on what an effective working relationship is	17	71
Experience of using SLI outside of HE	Comments or quotes about working with interpreters outside of education - mostly in the workplace	3	3
Experience of using SLI Prior to HE	Expectations or experience of using or working with SLI prior to higher education.	8	22
Feedback and Quality of SLI	comments regarding any feedback to interpreters or references to the interpreter's quality of interpretation	18	55
Feeling included or welcomed	Personal feelings of deaf students feeling included or welcome	6	17
Flexibility in access supports depending on need	Students referring to mixture different supports e.g. ISL, captioning, depending on class subject or the type of class	7	14
Friendship - Interpreter and Student	References to where interpreter and student develop a relationship outside of education - friendship and boundaries	8	8
HE inclusion policy	References to college policies - whether it was funding, inclusion, etc.	12	17
hearing students becoming aware	instances where hearing students benefited or gained knowledge about the deaf community or ISL	6	9
Inaccessible or Barriers	Instances where it references inaccessibility or the presence of barriers	11	20
In-house interpreters	Specific references to interpreters employed with university	2	6
Interactions with Student-Intp-Lecturer	Situations that occurred which in which all three stakeholders interacted.	13	25
Interpreter arriving late	Instances where interpreters arrived late -	3	5

Interpreter boundaries	Covers ethics, dilemmas, overstepping their role, being aware of boundaries	11	56
Interpreter Confidentiality	Situations where confidentiality was mentioned or referenced	9	15
Interpreter for modules	Related to question - did you have interpreters for all modules	6	6
Interpreter income	References to income or payment of interpreters	2	3
Interpreter Preference	References where a student has a preference or favourite interpreters	7	11
Interpreter Preparation	Preparation material for interpreters - reading notes and slides etc.	18	68
Interpreter Self-Reflection	understanding whether they are the right fit for the job - assessing their skills	14	37
Interpreter Supply and Demand	Lack of availability - supply - demand - need for two interpreters	10	13
Interpreter tone of voice and NMFs	References to interpreters voicing over, their style in terms of NMFs and tone of voice	8	17
Interpreter training	Comments regarding elements of interpreter's training - whether actual or expected	9	17
Interpreters – last-minute replacement	References to interpreters covering on behalf of others.	7	18
Interpreters interjecting	References to interpreters interjecting in class to the lecturer or to other interpreters	14	31
Interpreter-Student Interactions	Specific situations where a lecturer and student interacted	16	53
Interpreting as just a job	Refers to interpreting as just a job or could be also that it's more than a job	7	12
Interpreting for deaf lecturers	Mentions regarding interpreters' voice-over of deaf lecturers to a hearing audience.	1	1
Intp admin work	Additional work involved such as booking, scheduling, liaison with agency, etc.	5	6
Intp Agency	references to interpreting agencies	5	10
Intp dress code	References to dress and professional appearance of interpreters	2	5
Intp introducing themselves	References to intps introducing themselves - whether to lecturer or others	6	10

Intps - biggest challenge	Linked to final question to interpreters - what is the biggest challenge	7	15
Intps – turn-taking	References to management of turn-taking - mostly in relation to group work	3	6
Intps as a unique need	Recognition intps as a unique need or a third-party person in room	4	4
Intps as professional	Mostly in reference to lack of acknowledgment by others of the interpreting profession or viewing interpreters as professionals.	6	17
Intps communication outside of classroom	Any type of communication regarding a deaf student outside the classroom - usually with other intps	8	30
Intps educating deaf students	Interpreters somewhat educating deaf students or signposting where to go	7	16
intps for exams	Specific mentions of using interpreters for exams	5	13
Intps supporting Intps	Sharing knowledge with one another - supporting in classroom	8	16
Intps supporting lecturers	Instances where the lecturers felt they were supported by interpreters - in terms of guidance, what to do, etc.	8	23
Intps working outside of the classroom	references to other colleges (not HE) or interpreting in social situations	3	7
Lack of understanding of role of interpreter	Instances where someone mentioned they weren't sure what the role was	12	34
Lecturer learning from deaf student	References where lecturers benefited or learned something from deaf students	6	10
Lecturer receiving training on deaf and ISL	Prior deaf awareness courses or ISL classes or some UDL - whether actual received or expected or wishes	7	14
Lecturer Teaching Styles	Comments regarding lecturer's style of teaching or suggestions of how they teach diverse learners.	21	95

Lecturer unapproachable	seeing it as a job, not willing to share materials, turning up and walking out, attitudes, etc.	8	22
Lecturer-Interpreter Interaction	any specific instances where lecturers chatted directly to interpreters	18	48
Lecturers' being approachable	Feeling comfortable to email, clarify, discuss things	7	11
Lecturers being inclusive	anything that related to lecturer's being inclusive, not just of deaf students but with all disabilities too.	13	66
Lecturers lack of awareness of support needs	References to instances where lecturer were not aware or did not engage with their support needs.	14	49
Lecturers' self-awareness	Instances of self-reflection or being aware of changes they made- either in the present or after the fact	6	27
Lecturers speaking too fast	Specific references to interpreters not being able to keep up with lecturer - speaking too fast	11	19
Length of Interpreting	References to duration or long days, etc.	7	19
More than one student compared to single	References to question ask around active participation or teaching style	10	14
Need for two interpreters	Specific references where there was a need for two interpreters - whether it happened or did not happen	7	21
Negative feelings of Deaf Students	deaf students feeling embarrassed, stupid, or isolated, vulnerable, not confident, etc.	14	47
New interpreters	references to new interpreters or recently graduated	11	38
Not getting a full interpretation	Students feeling they don't get full info or intps not being able to get everything in classroom	16	33
Notetaking Support	Comments or experience regarding the use of note-takers	16	40

One-to-One Tutorials	specific reference to one-to-one tutorials	5	5
Online interpreting	References to online interpreting and some online learning	8	12
Other supports	Anything else - proofreading, transcripts, other supports not including captioning, 1-2-1 tutorials or interpreting	7	11
Potential Quotes		10	16
Processing visual content and signing and notes	challenges or references when trying to look at board, lecturer, interpreter and take notes.	10	19
Regular Interpreters	references to having the same interpreters throughout college	17	43
Role - Facilitating and Relaying Information	Anything that was mentioned regarding relaying of communication between the three parties. Linked to the role of interpreter question	19	36
Role - intp to blend in	instances where intps should blend in or be in the background or be a third person	5	11
Role - Lecturer	Comments regarding the perception of the role of a lecturer. Linked to the role of the lecturer question	15	47
Role - SLIs as Advocates	Interpreters having to advocate, guide, fight for access, raise awareness - anything outside of actual interpreting in a classroom.	12	27
Role - student	Linked to what is the student's role question	12	35
Role - Support Services	Comments regarding the interaction with Support Services - linked to role of support services question	19	43
Role interpreter in enabling access	Interpreter role to enable access - more than just facilitating information	7	15
Single deaf student - motivation and perception	Perception of how a single student fares in the classroom by intps and lecturers	9	18

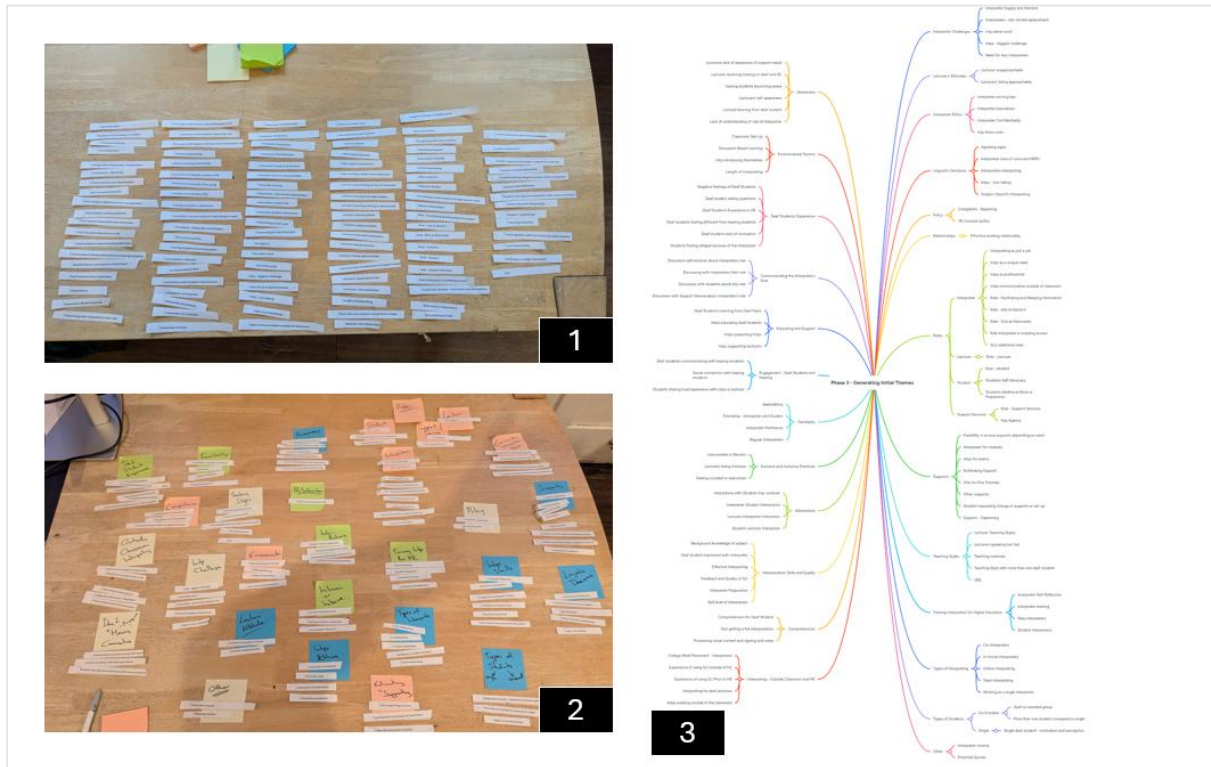
Skill level of interpreters	Instances where intps was not able to do the job, didn't know how to manage situations, confidence level, and experience	15	36
SLIs additional roles	SLIs as having additional roles - staying behind, reminding students, chatting to deaf person, educating etc..	16	83
Social connection with hearing students	Any type of interaction with hearing students - whether with interpreter or not - making friends, socialising etc.	13	32
Student interpreters	References to student interpreters on placement	3	7
Student requesting change in supports or setup	Students wanting to change their supports or change how the room is set up	5	8
Student-Lecturer Interaction	Specific instances where the student interacted with the lecturer	15	29
Students feeling obliged because of the interpreter	Having to come to college because of the interpreter - making eye contact - feeling like have to watch interpreter all the time.	7	13
Students Self-Advocacy	Comments relating to having to advocate for themselves or educate themselves or just learn as they go	12	25
Students sharing lived experience with class or lecturer	Instances where student stood up or shared their own experience	3	6
Subject-Specific Interpreting	Issues or comments regarding interpreting a specific subject at HE. Includes things like numerical, preference in support between ISL or written	18	71
Support - Captioning	Experience of using captions - in-person and online	5	9
Teaching materials	Can include notes, PowerPoints, visuals, audio, resources, etc.	11	26
Teaching Style with more than one deaf student	Linked to question on - do you think the teaching style would have changed	14	27

Team Interpreting	Where there are references to a team of interpreters working for a deaf student - this can be 2 or 3 or a team of regular interpreters who cover	11	30
UDL	Specific mention of UDL	3	7
Working as a single interpreter	References to being a single interpreter or working solo	9	26

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes

Figure M1

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes



Note. Images 1 and 2 illustrates the manual process used to generate initial themes. Image 3 presents a digitised replication of this process, capturing the same structure.

Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

Figure M2

Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

The image shows a software interface with two panels. The top panel, 'Phase 3 - Generating initial themes from coded and collated data (developing categories)', lists several categories with their respective file and reference counts. The bottom panel, 'Phase 4 - Developing and reviewing themes (coding on)', provides a more granular view of the 'Environment' category, listing sub-themes like 'Deaf Students sitting together' and 'Group Work'. Blue arrows and ovals indicate the flow of information and specific items of interest.

Phase 3 - Generating initial themes from coded and collated data (developing categories)			
Name	Files	References	
Environment	20	127	
Classroom Set-Up	18	57	
Discussion Based Learning	17	41	
Intp introducing themselves	6	10	
Length of Interpreting	7	19	

Phase 4 - Developing and reviewing themes (coding on)			
Name	Files	References	
Environment	20	124	
Classroom Set-Up	17	53	
Deaf Students sitting together	1	2	
General and Managing Classroom	5	7	
Lecturer numbers	2	2	
Number of students in classroom	11	18	
Physical set up and Positioning	13	28	
Discussion Based Learning	17	41	
Group Work	13	24	
Interpreters as a variable	12	22	
Intp introducing themselves	7	11	
Length of Interpreting	7	19	

Note. This illustrates an example of the coding on process, where each code was reviewed further for analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Phase 5 involved multiple rounds of refinement, defining and renaming of themes. Both manual and digital processes were employed. Figure M3 illustrates the various stages with Figure M4 representing the final thematic map.

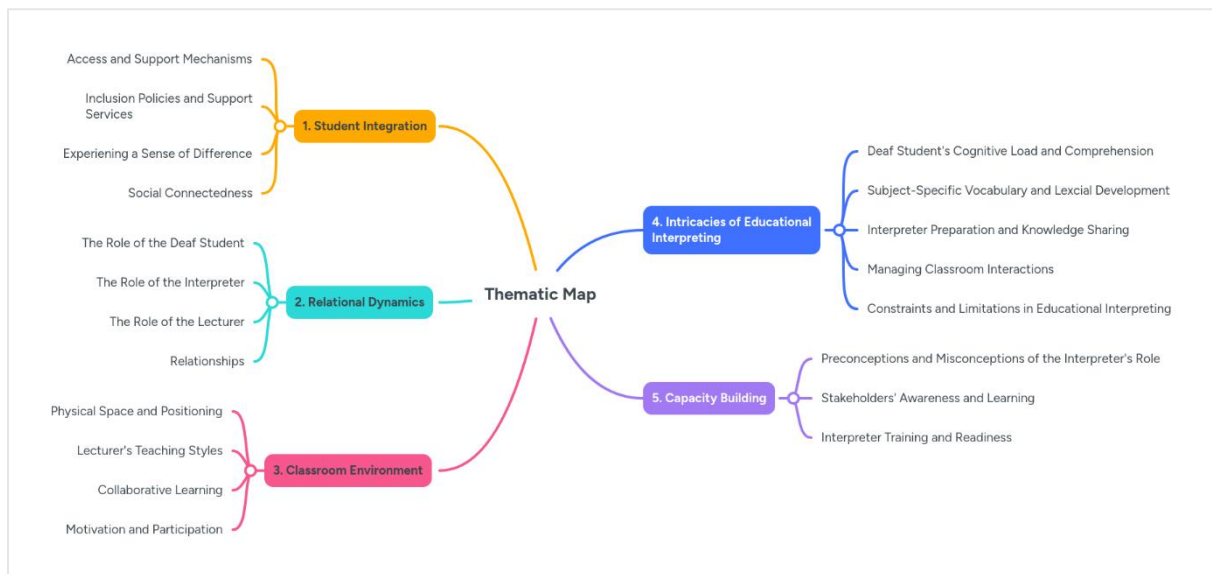
Figure M3

Phase 5: Iterations of Defining and Naming Themes



Figure M4

Phase 5: Final Thematic Map



Appendix N

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Table N1

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Summary Notes
Student Inclusion	<i>Access Supports</i>	interpreters for modules and exams, captioning, notetaking, flexibility in supports depending on the need.
	<i>Policy and Support Services</i>	awareness of providing supports, funding, the role of support services.
	<i>A Sense of Difference</i>	feeling different or standing out, barriers or inaccessibility, confidence level, isolation.
	<i>Social Connectedness</i>	feeling included or welcomed, building social connections outside of the classroom.
Relational Dynamics	<i>The Role of the Deaf Student</i>	Understanding their rights, assertiveness, burden of additional work and preparation, liaison with stakeholders.
	<i>The Role of the Interpreter</i>	Facilitating and relaying information, blending in, not being seen as a professional, additional roles, being an advocate.
	<i>The Role of the Lecturer</i>	Teach and pass on knowledge, to be accessible and inclusive.
	<i>Relationships</i>	Understanding expectations, familiarity, dependency, collaborating and communication, willingness, respect.
Classroom Environment	<i>Physical Space and Positioning</i>	Class sizes, physical positioning of interpreter, eye-contact with interpreter.
	<i>Lecturer's Teaching Styles</i>	Teaching materials, speaking too fast, engaging students, adapting,

		and making accommodations, self-awareness, attitudes.
	<i>Collaborative Learning</i>	Group work, workshops, strategies for managing classroom discourse.
	<i>Motivation and Participation</i>	Asking questions, contributing, confidence levels between a single student and a group of deaf students.
Intricacies of Educational Interpreting	<i>Deaf Student's Cognitive Load and Comprehension</i>	Subject topic and terminology, processing visual information, eye fatigue, interpreter style.
	<i>Subject-Specific Vocabulary and Lexical Development</i>	Developing vocabulary, agreeing signs, intensity, numerical and technical language.
	<i>Interpreter Preparation and Knowledge Sharing</i>	Interpreter preparation, background knowledge, team interpreting, interpreters supporting one another.
	<i>Managing Classroom Interactions</i>	Introductions, managing turn-taking, interjecting, non-manual features.
	<i>Constraints and Limitations in Interpreting</i>	Skill level required, recognising limitations, confidentiality, supply, and demand, duration, working as single interpreter
Capacity Building	<i>Perceptions and Misconceptions of the Interpreter's Role</i>	Lack of understanding and experience of working with interpreters, discussing role of interpreters with stakeholders
	<i>Stakeholders' Awareness and Learning</i>	Hearing students and lecturers learning from deaf students, receiving training, awareness of support needs.
	<i>Interpreter Training and Readiness</i>	Vocabulary, managing situations, self-reflection, suitability, working in education upon graduation.

Appendix O

Supporting Deaf Students: Sample Online Training Programme

Supporting Deaf Students- Home

https://sites.google.com/mail.dcu.ie/supportingdeafstudents/home?authuser=0

Supporting Deaf Students in Higher Education

A Guide for Lecturers on Inclusive Practice and Working with Interpreters

Welcome to this resource hub designed to support lecturers in Irish higher education institutions.

This site offers practical guidance, insights, and strategies to foster inclusive learning environments for deaf students, particularly those who use Irish Sign Language (ISL) and how to work effectively and collaboratively with interpreters in the classroom.

Understanding Deaf Students

Build awareness of deaf students' experiences and challenges in higher education, and understand how identity and access shape their learning journey.

Working with Interpreters

Get confident working with educational interpreters, know what their role is (and isn't), and how to work with them effectively to support deaf students.

Inclusive Teaching Practices

Learn practical ways to make your teaching more accessible for deaf students, from using visuals and captions to adjusting your pace and layout.

Building Effective Relationships

Understand how to build strong, respectful relationships with deaf students and interpreters that support learning, trust, and collaboration.

Whole Campus Approach

Recognise how inclusion goes beyond the classroom and how your campus culture, policies, and social spaces can support deaf students.

Supports and Resources

Get familiar with the supports, services, and resources available to you and your students, and how to use them effectively.

This website serves as a demonstration of what an online training programme for higher education lecturers could look like.

Caroline McGrotty - October 2025

Note. An online version of the above content is available by visiting [Supporting Deaf Students](#).

Appendix P

Poster at International Congress on the Education of the Deaf

In November 2024, I submitted a proposal to present at the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED), scheduled to take place in Rome, Italy, from the 7th to 11th July 2025. ICED, established in the late 19th Century, is the oldest congress in the field of DHH education. Held every five years in various locations around the world, it is regarded as one of the most prestigious and influential events in its field.

My research was accepted as a poster presentation, shown in Figure P1. This involved delivering a three-minute synopsis of my research, after which delegates visited the poster exhibition area to engage with me directly. Approximately 50 people attended the seminar session, and during the exhibition, around 40 printed copies of my poster were taken. I discussed my research with delegates from Ireland, Australia, Finland, South Africa, the United States of America, and Japan. Following the congress, two individuals from Singapore and The Netherlands contacted me to request further information.

Figure P1

Poster at International Congress on the Education of the Deaf

