

From the policy on implementing the inclusive schools project to the education of deaf students at Eduardo Mondlane University

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Abstract: The implementation of the Inclusive Schools Project in 1998 marked a milestone in the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, ensuring the use of Sign Language as a medium of instruction. That process contributed to the establishment, in 2013, of the Bachelor's Degree in Mozambican Sign Language Teaching at Eduardo Mondlane University, raising expectations of significant changes in the training of deaf students from mainstream education. Ten years later, many of these students still do not fully identify with the adopted curriculum, demonstrating difficulties in understanding and mastering contents of various subjects, particularly General Didactics. With the aim of reflecting on educational policies and their implementation in the curriculum of the aforementioned course, a qualitative interpretive study was conducted based on the analysis of a semi-structured interview with a deaf student. The findings reveal that the student faces difficulties in understanding curriculum content, even when some subjects are taught by deaf teachers. Although the inclusive schools policy has promoted greater access for deaf students to formal curricula, its implementation has not yet ensured genuinely inclusive learning. It is concluded that deaf students must be provided with curriculum content that respects their linguistic and cultural specificities, recognising Mozambican Sign Language as a legitimate language of instruction and access to knowledge. The promotion of linguistic equity requires the reformulation of curricula and pedagogical practices so that they are designed based on the needs of deaf students rather than their adaptation to educational models predominantly oriented towards hearing student.

Keywords: Sign Language Teaching at UEM; Deaf Students Education; inclusive schools project; curriculum; linguistic equity.

1 Introduction

Since 1975, the year of the independence, Mozambique has sought to establish political and socio-economic bases that allow its construction and affirmation as a united nation and with its own identity. From that moment on, there was a systematic appeal to the (re)construction and (re)valorisation cultural habits and customs, by means of planning and materialization of different actions for these purposes. This resulted, in the educational and pedagogical plan, in a process of massification of education, throughout the national territory.

The fact that the Portuguese language was elected as the official language, of administration and public instruction, maximized the desired superiority and prestige of this language in detriment to the local languages, an ideology already defended by



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the colonial regime. Portuguese colonial domination enforced an educational policy that completely devalued one of the major factors of linguistic dynamism, a process that would be inherited and perpetuated by the new National Education System (NES) (República Popular de Moçambique, 1983).

From the 1990's onwards, this ideology was questioned at national and international level. Internationally, there were several debates surrounding the rights to education, equal opportunities, access to school, to the mother tongue, among others, for children and youth with Special Educational Needs¹ (SEN). As an example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989, established that all rights must be applied to all children without discrimination and recognized the right of a "mental or physically disabled child" to a full and dignified life, in conditions that ensure their dignity, promote their autonomy and facilitate their active participation in life.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank Group organized, in 1990, the World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien, where it was stipulated that the States should guarantee equal opportunities in access to education for all *people with disabilities*². Following the Jomtien Conference, in 1994, the Salamanca Statement advocated, among several other guidelines, that children and young people with SEN should have access to regular schools that should adapt to their needs. To further support to this idea, UNESCO (1994) advised that all human beings have the right to

¹ According to the Salamanca Statement (1994), the acronym SNE– from now onwards used in this article – refers to all children and young people which needs stem from their learning abilities or difficulties.

² According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (OMS, 1980), a person with disability (PwD) is someone that, due to a cognitive or acquired anomaly of anatomical, physiological, sensorial or mental nature, is in a disadvantage or unable, by physical and/or societal barriers to normally perform an activity. It is noteworthy that in Mozambique, the definition of this acronym (PwD) was not consensual despite all the efforts undertaken in defense of human dignity by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN, 1981); United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 1989). In some legal instruments such as the Constitution of the Republic (1990; 2004), Policy of the Handicapped Person from 1999 there are still some pejorative expressions that remain such as Handicapped Person implying that part of these people's bodies is useless, incapable or weak (Plano Estratégico, 2012 - 2015). It was only from January 2012, with the official ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that Mozambique adopted the term Person with disabilities (PwD), and in the education sector these people are designated as Persons with Special Education Needs (PSEN), acronyms which will henceforth be used in this research.

education, which means that all should be treated according to their specificities, independent of their origin and condition.

In light of these fundamental rights and principles regarding the inclusion of people with SEN, Mozambique began to prioritize certain indicators established in the law and in teaching programmes in order to meet policies of inclusion, equality and access to school. In its inclusion policies, it has prioritized, among several aspects, its various conceptions, infrastructures, the improvement of curricular guidelines and learning strategies, teacher training (in both mainstream and special schools), the organization of resources and means, as well as the involvement of professional and social partners. In this regard, the Mozambican Government created the National Education System (NES) in 1983, through Law 4/83 of March 23rd, which, in turn, was reformulated in 1992 by Law 6/92 of May 6th.

Continuing these reforms, in 1998, the “Inclusive Schools Project” was created and the inclusion education policy was implemented in some public schools, including the first national university – Eduardo Mondlane University – thus observing a shift in the paradigm of the perception of school inclusion. Aiming to contribute towards a quality education, the present study intends to reflect on the policies and their applicability in the curriculum based on the undergraduate degree in Sign Language Teaching, in which deaf students are enrolled at Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU).

2 Educational answers for the deaf

It is worth to situate the Pilot Project for the Implementation of Inclusive Education within the context in which it emerged. Thus, going back in time, since ancient times up to the 16th century, deaf people were marginalized from the economic, social, cultural, educational and political world, being considered as handicapped and incapable, deprived of their rights and of the possibility of making choices. It was in the mid of 1960 that experiments in integration of deaf people, in mainstream school, as an answer to segregated structures, accused of creating artificiality and ghettos and of hindering the future integration into daily and professional life. For example, doctors and educators, challenging the prevailing concepts of the time, believed in the capabilities of individuals until then considered uneducable, as is the case of deaf people. Focused on the pedagogic vision, in a society in which a

formal education was a right to only a few, these pioneers developed their work in a tutorial system, acting themselves as teachers to their pupils. Despite some scarce innovative experiments since the 16th century, care was merely custodial and, the institutionalization in asylums and mental hospitals was the main social response for the treatment of those considered “abnormal” (Mendes, 2006).

Alongside this asylum evolution, Mendes (2006) refers that the institutionalization of compulsory schooling and the inability of the school to meet the learning needs of all students gave rise, as early as the 19th century, to the first special classes in mainstream schools, to where students with disabilities and learning difficulties were referred. The establishment of special classes in mainstream schools played a double role in society: on one hand, it provided clinical and educational services for people considered handicapped and, on the other hand, implemented behaviours that gave rise to the notion of “abnormality” (Mendes, 2006). According to Magalhães and Cardoso (2011), until the mid-20th century, the provision of services to meet the specific needs of children and young people by the education systems was carried out in segregated environments, that is, those that provided socio-educational services separated from the mainstream teaching environments.

However, the social movements for human rights, intensified in the 1960's, raised awareness and sensibilized society on the damages of segregation and marginalization of individuals of minority groups, making the systematic segregation of any group an intolerable practice. This is how, at the end of the 20th century, the paradigm shift movement known as “[Philosophy of the normalization and integration in special education [...]]” emerged (Magalhães; Cardoso, 2011, p. 16).

This philosophy was based in the assumption that children with learning difficulties/problems would have the right to be taught alongside their peers, in public school. Only children with more severe or profound deficits would continue in special schools. The idea advocated from then on, was that these children should be placed in the least restrictive environment possible (Wade; Moore, 1992), understanding this concept as choosing a school that allowed the children's capabilities to be maximized,

so that they could achieve a better integration³ into society. This paradigm was also criticized insofar that it assumed the transition of students with SEN from a more segregated level of service to a more inclusive one, depending solely on the child's progress. In practice, this transition rarely happened, which compromised the assumptions of school integration (Mendes, 2006).

These experiments had a significant impact in Mozambique, after 1975 the year of the national independence. The Mozambican government began the nationalization processes⁴, with the schools⁵ created to serve children with SEN, including deaf children, were included in the “Direção Nacional de Ação Social (DNAS)” (Gómez, 1999).

At that time, the DNAS was under tutelage of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). The integration was made based on the medical method, from which all students underwent neuropsychopedagogical evaluation for their “acceptance” into the newly created schools. Based on a mental examination, those who presented “normality” were referred to mainstream classes while those that present “anomalies” were assigned to special classes (República de Moçambique, 1995).

From a pedagogical point of view, the special education programs were the same as those adopted for the regular primary education, with subjects were taught for an indefinite period of time. The classes consisted of no less than eight students and no more than twelve. Students with SEN, particularly deaf students, lacked both proficiency in and access to sign language.

However, from 1977 onwards, with proposals to create a single education system that should change teaching programs, curriculum and content, the MEC, through the National School Social Service Action (NSSSA), took partial control over the activities carried out in those special schools. Conversely, an armed conflict between the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the Mozambique National

³ The term integration could, thus, be defined from two perspectives: i) as untouchable, whole and ii) as a mere placement of people considered handicapped in a same school, without this implying the same class.

⁴ Nationalization is understood as the expropriation of private company by the State with the purpose of having the economic activities to be managed by the latter in order to achieve a better social welfare.

⁵ Schools created in the Portuguese colonial regime, under the frame of Diploma Legislativo 2.288 of September 25th 1962. These schools were intended to help children with educational delays.

Resistance (RENAMO) erupted at the time, which, in a way, shook the functioning of many institutions in the country, and Special Education system was no exception.

The political and economic situation in which Mozambique found itself was disastrous. Due to the civil war, there was a great deal of social mobility – from the interior towards the capital cities – and most of the infrastructures, among which schools and hospitals were destroyed. The “Direção Nacional de Ação Social (DNAS)” lacked both economic resources and specialized technical personnel to implement new dynamics into these schools, which led to them being in a precarious situation until 1982. The armed conflict between Frelimo and Renamo lasted ten years. And, as one can deduce, the number of students in schools, at the time, was significantly reduced.

According to numerical data from MEC (Ferreira; Manhiça, 1998), the number of children and young people with learning difficulties and children considered handicapped in the aforementioned schools, from 1976 to 1990, ranged from 20 to 50 students and the teacher-student ratio was of three to seven students. Regarding mainstream education, statistical data from the Report of the Seminar on Children Affected by War (1997) show a gross admission rate in primary education (EP1) of 67%.

As reported by Ferreira e Manhiça (1998), until then there were no official statistical data on the number of children with SEN in mainstream schools, but according to a survey carried out by UNESCO (1988), in 58 countries, all East and Southern African countries had 0.1% or less of children with SEN, considering the entire school-age children population.

Based in these data about the educational reality, the Mozambican government established as one of its priority goals the improvement of the quality of education through teacher training and the inclusion of all children and young people in the mainstream education system. In this context, the Ministry of Education began a process of mobilizing human, technical and financial resources to provide support to the population afflicted by war. This led to the foundation of an emergency training programme, an educational program for the child victim of war, a special support programme for children and teachers victims of war, among others.

With the introduction of the new NES in 1983, these reforms were even further accentuated. The expression SE gained new meaning. According to Law 4/83 of SNE (República Popular de Moçambique, 1983, capítulo II, artigo 18) the EE consists of “education of children and young people with physical and mental disabilities” or of “difficult social integration”, being carried out in special schools. The same article also establishes as an objective of the EE, to provide training that allows the integration of these children and young people in society and working life.

According to the “Direção Nacional de Ação Social”, in addition to the integration of these children, there was, at the time, and additional work that consisted of involving the community in process of basic educational and instruction process of the children (People's Republic of Mozambique, 1988). That process could only be achieved if the specific needs of each child were respected. As a result of socioeconomic and political changes that the country experience during the first fifteen years of its independence (1975) the SNE was reformulated by Law 6/92 of May 6th, which produced significant changes with respect to its content.

In what concerns SE Law 6/92 establishes that “Children and young people with physical, sensory and mental disabilities or who are difficult integrate into school [...]” should be educated through special classes within mainstream schools (República de Moçambique, 1992, capítulo IV, artigo 29); and that “[...] children with multiple severe disabilities or profound mental retardation [...]” should receive an education adapted to their abilities through extracurricular education (República de Moçambique, 1992, capítulo IV, artigo 29). In regard to the teachers to this type of education, Resolution N° 8/95 of August 22th, which approves the National Education Policy, states that they did not possess the qualification, nor were they trained in techniques and methodologies for the special care of children with sensory, mental, physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Therefore, mainstream schools — instead of special schools⁶ — and Inclusive Education Resource Centres (Centros de Recursos de Educação Inclusiva - CREI⁷) were created nationwide to meet the needs

⁶ Schools created in the Portuguese colonial regime, under the frame of Diploma Legislativo 2.288 of September 25th 1962. These schools were intended to help children with educational delays.

⁷ In addition to receiving children with disabilities, The Inclusive Education Resource Centres, are equipped to train and enable professionals, diagnose and guide children, produce materials, mobilize and raise awareness in the community among other things.

of children with SEN. It is noteworthy, that the term SEN refers to any and all pedagogical support⁸ that children and young people (whether or not excluded from mainstream education systems) need to learn.

What is possible to determine from this reformulation of Law 6/92 of the NES (República de Moçambique, 1992) is that SE now includes the education of children and young people with sensory difficulties⁹, who are, in turn, considered in this article to be deaf, and not only those with “physical and mental difficulties” as was the case in the colonial system and in Law 4/83 (República de Moçambique, 1992). At that time, in 1992, SE aimed to provide training at all levels of education and a vocational training that would allow the integration of these children and young people into mainstream school, in society and working life.

Another modification, according to the same document, consisted in defining the oversight of SE, which, with the reformulation of law 6/92 República de Moçambique, 1992), fell under the domain, not only of the Ministry of Education but also of the Ministry of Health and the Secretary of State for Social Action. These entities are “Responsible for establishing the rules, supporting and monitoring their compliance and defining the criteria for the opening, operation and closing of the special education establishments” (República de Moçambique, 1992, capítulo IV, artigo 29).

An issue that deserves attention is the preservation, among the objectives of the reformulated SNE, of the guarantee of education for an ever-increasing number of students and improving the quality of the services provided in all levels and types of education. It is worth noting that the civil war between Frelimo and Renamo ended in 1992, with the Peace Agreement signed on October 4th. The signing of the peace agreement established a climate of social stability in Mozambique, and the government pledged to developing actions to reintegrate actions in the education system of children with SEN, including those that suffered trauma and acquired disabilities as a result of the war. During the 1990's, several special schools operated in the country. These

⁸ A special educational need exists when a physical, cultural, religious, sensory, intellectual, emotional, social, environmental problem, or any combination thereof, affects learning to the point of special access to the curriculum or specially adapted learning conditions are necessary for the student to be able to receive a proper education.

⁹ Deaf or hypoacusic – hard of hearing – according to the Ministry of Education document. According to this document, the following are types of SE: gifted, mental retarded, deaf or hypoacusic, blind or amblyope among others.

schools aimed to “rehabilitate children that expressed learning delays” (República Portuguesa, 1962, p. 420). The students graduated the 1st degree of primary education and then were integrated in mainstream schools. In mainstream schools, diagnostic classes were formed in order to “[...] support students with learning disabilities arising from different factors [...]” (República de Moçambique, 2019). Noteworthy is that, with the approval of Law 6/92 (República de Moçambique, 1992) a new perspective was introduced in this sector. Children with mild disabilities and/or SEN are included in mainstream schools and those with severe disabilities and/or SEN remain in the special schools. Due to children being included in mainstream schools, these schools have come to be designated as inclusive. Inclusive schools are those whose principle is based on the schooling of children and young people, whether or not they present learning difficulties, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994).

In what concerns students with sensory difficulties – here assumed as deaf – there were four special primary schools and seven mainstream schools operating. The special schools were Escola Especial nº 1¹⁰, Escola Comunitária da Associação dos Deficientes de Moçambique (Ademo), Escola Especial nº 3 and Escola Sangarivei. There, teachers were formed in the area of special education and mastered sign language, which was used in the teaching and learning process. Contrary to special schools, in mainstream schools teaching was oralized, compromising, in a way, the aforementioned concept of inclusive schools.

In regard to school access, the Ministry of Education (República de Moçambique, 1988) reveals a reduced number of students in special schools since the country, besides the end of the civil war, lacked the specialized human financial and material resources capable of offering an appropriate education for enrolled children.

The 1990's, in addition to marking the end of the civil war, was a time where awareness of SEN issues was raised, almost worldwide. Thus, with education being recognized and legitimized as a right of every citizen by the United Nations, in Paris (1948), this same right was renewed by the international community in the World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien (1990) and recalled in the World Conference on Special Education Needs, held in Salamanca in 1994. The right to

¹⁰ Escola especial nº 1 includes children with sensory difficulties and/or with severe deafness and nº 3 children with mild auditory difficulties including hypoacusic deaf children.

education envisioned the creation of learning conditions for children with SEN, aiming to reduce exclusion and promote inclusion. It was, indeed, with the World Conference on Special Education Needs (1994) that the perspective of inclusive education was introduced, with the notion that all children should learn together at school.

Thus, according to the frame of UNESCO's programs in what concerns inclusive schools, the Portuguese government was mobilized to finance the project in Portuguese-speaking African countries. Since Mozambique is a member of the Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP), the Portuguese government focused its activities on the mobilization of the Mozambican government in regard to the education of children and young people with SEN and in the elaboration of a national "Pilot Project Inclusive Schools" in which the bases for the implementation of inclusive schools would be established (Ferreira; Manhiça, 1998, p. 6). This was how the inclusion of children with SEN was introduced in 1998, in the context of the government Strategic Plan for Education (Plano Estratégico de Educação) for the period 1998/9-2003/4. Furthermore, Mozambique ratified, in 2012, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, having restated the universal principles of dignity, integrity and equality for all, with no exception.

Due to these principles, the access to school of children with SEN increased. Statistical data reveal that by 2015, there were approximately 100 000 children with SEN (República de Moçambique, 2016). However, its participation in Secondary School was limited to little over 200 students. Therefore, the great majority of students with SEN was found in any type of school, which constitutes a generalized exclusion of school in regard to the rhetoric of integration and/or the recent proposal of school inclusion.

The integration rhetoric, according to Sassaki (1997), consists of the act of transforming a student, with the ability to interact and learn in a common class, in a determined mainstream school. In this rhetoric, this author adds, students with disabilities that were, incidentally, more able, were referred to mainstream schools and stayed until they managed to follow the common teaching process. Different from integration, inclusion "[...] proposes a single quality educational system for all students, whether with or without disabilities and with or without types of atypical conditions" (Reis, 2006, p. 41). It is an educational model that includes all persons victims of

exclusion, and that in fact, values the differences of each one. Indeed, what is perceived in Reis (2006) vision is that inclusion postulated a reorganization in the teaching systems, aiming that every school becomes inclusive, a favourable environment that fosters all individuals, without any distinction or discrimination. Thereby, an inclusive education should overcome the barriers of prejudice and offer a quality education.

In what concerns the reduced student participation in secondary education in Mozambique, as mentioned previously, it was not limited to lack of access. The few students who did have access to school were not receiving an appropriate education as there were neither qualified professionals, in one hand, nor financial resources on the other. Aware of the countless educational needs that remained unmet, the Government recognized that the lack of financial and human resources did not allow all of those needs to be met simultaneously. In these terms, the Government created opportunities for children with SEN, prioritizing the development of the special education in Mozambique. This governmental initiative consisted of serving this audience in common classes, thus encouraging a partnership between Special Education and common/mainstream education, which according to Mendes (2006), may have triggered the perspective of inclusion.

This perspective of inclusion is also evidenced in the most recent Law 18/2018, of December 28th, that defines Special Education as being:

[...] um conjunto de serviços pedagógicos-educativos, transversais a todos os subsistemas da educação¹¹, de apoio e facilitação de aprendizagem de todo o aluno, incluindo aquele que tem necessidades educativas especiais de natureza física, sensorial, mental, múltiplas e outras, com base nas suas características individuais com o fim de maximizar o seu potencial (República de Moçambique, 2018, capítulo II, artigo 18, n. 1).

[...] a set of pedagogical-educational services, transversal to all subsystems of education¹², to support and facilitate learning for all students, including those who have special education needs of a physical, sensory, mental, multiple and other nature, based on their individual characteristics with the purpose of maximizing their potential (República de Moçambique, 2018, capítulo II, artigo 18, n. 1).

¹¹ The National Teaching System (NTS) is constituted by 5 subsystems, namely: subsystem of pre-school education, subsystem of general education, subsystem of adult education, subsystem of professional education and training of teachers and subsystem of higher education.

The underlying idea in this inclusion is that it can benefit, not only students that present any type of disability but also to students that are not framed as disabled but suffer the effects of a teaching and learning process that promoted their school failure. It is important, however, to highlight that in this new Law 18/2018, Special Education is not limited to one and only one education subsystem, but to all, envisioning providing to the child, young persons and adult training and vocational ability that allows their integration in society, working like and to continue their studies.

This is how Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU), in its Strategic Plan for 2008-2012, advocates widening the offer of graduation and post-graduation courses and programmes, paying particular attention, on one hand, to those who still are not taught by other local institutions and on another hand to the needs and development plans of the country. In the context of what is established in the Constitution of the Republic, in the Education Strategic Plan and in the Strategic Plan of EMU that the Faculty of Education, aiming to accommodate the inclusive education policies of the Mozambican Government and of MINEDH in particular, proposed the adding a Bachelor's* Degree in Mozambican Sign Language (Licenciatura em Língua de Sinais Moçambicana - LLSM) in the frame of their development plan.

The Faculty of Education (FACED) intends, essentially, to meet the training and qualification needs of the students in the area do Mozambican Sign Language (LSM). In detail, it aims to improve the access and quality of teaching offers to deaf students by means of an initiation process of alphabetization in Sign Language prior to the alphabetization in Portuguese language. It is, actually, a model that distances itself from the clinical vision of deafness – sociocultural – and is based on the recognition of LSM as the first language of teaching and that of the written Portuguese language, as an equality guarantee of the academic curriculum (Bavo, 2019). In this educational model, the deaf students are placed in a hearing class with teachers unfamiliar with LSM and with interpreters with no profound grasp of deaf culture. The assumption is that, from the sociocultural education model for the deaf, the student identifies as bicultural, develops their potential within a deaf culture and, through it, approaches hearing culture.

* T.N. Bachelor's degree in Portugal is designated as Licenciatura.

Regarding the educational model adopted, Coelho (2010) states that subscribing to its guiding principles is not enough. It is necessary that the psychosocial, cultural and linguistic realities of the deaf are deeply and rigorously respected. The author adds that the initial and continuous training, of the professionals that work with the deaf, cannot be outlined superficially, nor in the absence of criteria in a clear and objective bilingual education.

With regard to the curricular plan of the degree, this is inserted in the 1st cycle of higher education training, with deaf and hearing people as the target group. The graduate from this bachelor's degree will be able to venture in various professional areas such as teaching, management of special education institutions, research, health, communication and information, development and planning, professional development and socio-community intervention.

Regarding duration the bachelor's degree in LSM, is 4 years long, organized by semesters, reflected in credit system, based on competencies, centred in participatory teaching methodologies, essentially visual. A successful completion of this degree enables the graduate to develop the skills defined in this document.

3 Methodology

Using document analysis and semi-structured interviews, we conducted a phenomenological-interpretative research study (Amado, 2014), with a student from the first class of the bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language at EMU, which was analysed using content analysis (Bardin, 2011). This analysis instrument was chosen because, according to the author, it encompasses

[...] A set of communication analysis techniques (interview protocols and life histories stories protocol, documents of various nature, images, films, advertisements) aimed at obtaining, through systematic and objective procedures for describing message content, indicators (quantitative or otherwise) that allow for the inference of knowledge regarding the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages (Bardin, 2011, p. 47).

As a way to obtain these indicators, the semi-structured interview was conducted with a deaf student from the first graduating class in LSM, in 2014, who was in a class where only three out of thirty students were deaf. For the research subject under study, we used a fictitious name, believing that this would guarantee a better

identification, confidentiality and data treatment. Aged between 40 and 45, he was granted an Informed Consent and the objective of the research explained.

Of the 3 deaf students, all male, only one was able to answer our semi-structured questions. The interviewee is 43 years old having acquired deafness at the age of seven (7) due to illness, malaria. He is fluent in Mozambican sign language, although having attended mainstream primary school (1st to 7th year). In addition, he is also fluent in Portuguese (PL) and English language, both in written form.

It is important to emphasize that the written proficiency of the PL, by the student was what allowed data to be collected via electronic mail (aka e-mail) and by instant message applications. The submitted responses were analysed by Content Analysis, as aforementioned, and for its operationalization, several functionalities, from simple analyses to coding and thematic categorization were used.

In what concerns thematic categorization, the obtained responses led us to the formulation of the following analysis axes: i) knowledge of the Inclusive Schools Pilot Project; ii) admission to the Sign Language degree at EMU; iii) teaching-learning methodologies of the curricular units; iv) relationship implications between deaf and hearing students; v) expectation towards the work market; and vi) changes in the implementation of inclusion policies at EMU.

4 The before and after the Bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language at EMU

From all the thematic axes formulated and using Content Analysis, we present, below, the results regarding three, namely: i) knowledge of the Inclusive Schools Pilot Project, ii) admission to the bachelor's degree at EMU and iii) changes in the implementation of inclusion policies at EMU.

Regarding the question in topic i), which refers to the knowledge of the implementation of the Inclusive Schools Pilot Project, the student Ntsumi (fictitious name) stated that he only ever heard of this project upon his admission at EMU, in 2014, although in 2003 he had been hired to teach in a mainstream school with deaf students, in Nampula (province north of Mozambique, where he is from). Ntsumi later mentions in his answers, that one of his deaf classmates confirmed the existence of that project, as he had heard of it during a research project on the production of a Sign

Language dictionary, of which he was part of, coordinated by a well-known Full Professor (Armando Ngunga) in 2011.

I only learned about this Project after enrolling as a student in Mozambican Sign Language bachelor's degree, at the Faculty of Education of Eduardo Mondlane University. However, I was perplexed because, in 2003, I was hired to teach primary education to deaf students in a special classroom at "Escola Primária 7 de Abril", in Nampula, without knowing that it was within the frame of the implementation of this "inclusive schools" project. [...] one of my colleagues told me he of this project because he had participated in sign recording for a sign language dictionary in 2011, coordinated by Prof. Ngunga... (E1. Ntsumi, 2025)¹³.

As it can be inferred, both *Ntsumi* and his classmate only had knowledge of the project years after its implementation, without realizing that it was response to international (UNESCO, 1994) and national (Ferreira; Manhiça, 1998) struggles for educational rights for the deaf. The lack of knowledge on educational policies and other actions concerning deaf people is due to the denial of their linguistic, cognitive and social rights by the hearing people.

According to the bibliography, deaf people have always been thought of in a world of hearing people and that, although the relevance of a Sign Language on their education is recognized, the specialized literature shows the interruption of this perspective by an educational stream that did not believe that this language could meet all the linguistic needs of these people, thus making them, passive hearing people or mere incompetents. Alves, Souza, Lima e Castanho (2015) state that the educational process of deaf people always presented different faces of an exclusion education, from the moment they were forced to speak and had their specificities systematically denied.

Since deaf people are, in their majority, children of hearing parents, their first language of communication is an oral language. These deaf individuals are subjected to learning an oral-auditory language, of which it does not have cognitive, social and affective proficiency. The fact that the deaf person is subject to an oral-auditory learning, given their unique visuospatial characteristics, does not allow them to develop a particular knowledge that enables them to reflect on this language. Even if oral skills develop, or they learn lip reading, their perception of this language is absorbed through

¹³ Research interview conducted on the 25th of April 2025, in Maputo

vision. It is the vision of lip movement that the deaf person relates to “written phonemes”, without going through the sound connection of this same phonological element (Soler; Martins, 2022).

This is why these authors (Soler; Martins, 2022) state that teaching based on the oral-auditory modality produced students who reproduce texts, without autonomy in writing and that hardly relate to the text in its entirety, if it is not based on meaningful acquisition, that is, in social practices that deal with written language as a meaning-producing experience. What happens is that the oral practice, mentioned previously, hinders deaf people progress in the use and development of their matrix language¹⁴, prioritizing an interlanguage, precisely because the people involved in the education process of deaf people are neither deaf nor native speakers of sign language.

Consequently, in all actions conceived by hearing people, there are few deaf people integrated into them, which creates barriers in accessing information by this group. The low level of knowledge of the Portuguese Language (PL), in its written form, the lack of involvement of the deaf person in deciding circles, distances them (the deaf person), ever so much, from the access to legal instruments, which in turn, result from public debates in the inclusion of deaf people in society.

In our understanding, deaf people must be considered as active participants in communication, regarding decision making, needing support to access public circles and guarantee that their linguistic rights as citizens as respected (Bavo, 2019).

When questioned on where he heard about the bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language at EMU and what he knew about it, the participant answered that he became aware of this information in the Mozambique Deaf People Association (ASUMO), having participated in stages of the implementation process, as can be observed in the answer below:

As a member of the Mozambique Deaf People Association (ASUMO), where I was part of the governing bodies, I had the pleasure of accompanying some of the stages of the proposal for implementation of this degree. Even in the production of the first LSM dictionary, produced by the African Studies Centre at EMU, under the leadership of Full Professor Armindo Ngunga. Thus, that was why I was one of the first deaf persons to be admitted in the degree as a

¹⁴ Matrix language is the language that structures and constitutes the subject, from which linguistic enunciations can be sustained.

model-student and also, one of the first deaf persons to complete the same degree ((E1. Ntsumi, 2025).

It can be observed in the above answer that, not only it is necessary to be in school but in entities that recognize the linguistic rights of deaf people and their specificities, as well, in order to obtain information. As a member of ASUMO, *Ntsumi* was privileged, being invited as a sign consultant in the embryonic stage of the implementation of the bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language at EMU. In 2011, he participated in research conducted by Professor Armindo Ngunga, from which the first printed dictionary of LSM resulted, with more than 1500 entries/signs (Ngunga *et al.*, 2013).

It is worth remembering that, in 2002, Ntsumi had already concluded medium level education (12th year)* in a mainstream school and had applied to higher education, unsuccessfully, for 10 years. None of the universities to which he applied had interpreters, let alone the idea of having one, which limited, for a long time, the possibility of continuing his studies. The presented testimony shows that deaf students have been placed in unequal participating conditions in teaching institutions and other social settings, since access to information, education, matrix language and, consequently, decision making processes, better jobs and juridic rights etc..., have been denied.

Lacerda (2017) highlights that the absence of interpreters, as mentioned before, impairs the interaction between deaf and hearing students, especially in the context of student-teacher relationship. "Deaf people are confined to participate only partially in different activities (by the non-access to the oral language), demotivated by the lack of access or total exclusion from information" (Lacerda, 2017, p. 34). Therefore, it was not possible for our interviewee to continue to dream of studying in universities where the teaching-learning conditions had not yet been created.

His registration in ASUMO as well as being a staff member of the Ministry of Education enabled him to carry out several training and professional development programs. These training and research experiences were what allowed him to be admitted in the bachelor's degree as a model-student, despite having faced other

* T.N. In Mozambique medium level education is equivalent to Secondary School in Portugal and Ensino Médio in Brasil.

obstacles in the degree's four years, among them inapt translators-interpreters, teachers lacking knowledge in LSM and in the inclusive model, as it will be addressed below.

When questioned about the bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language, we ascertained that, although evaluated positively, the training/formative path presented some challenges. Although the presence of LSM interpreters was guaranteed throughout the degree, those professionals lacked proficiency in the area, which remarkably hindered the learning of content taught in the subjects, according to the answer below from our interviewee:

I cannot complain of many things, because during my path as a student, it was the beginning of the degree. There were ups and downs: First, I can complain about the inadequate preparation of the LSM interpreters (all 4 began without any training or experience in higher education). Thus, everything was new for them as well as for us, the students (we were 3) because we had to propose signs for each concept. It was challenging ((E1. Ntsumi, 2025).

It is clear from the answer above, the poor command of the Portuguese and Sign Language from both students and interpreters even though students could negotiate signs in class. Considering the dynamic character of classes, it is understandable that, in the process of negotiation of new signs, between the student and the translation and interpretation professional, that part of the contents could not be followed, not being clear the moments where those losses would be compensated.

According to Prates and Manzini (2020), the work of the interpreter is of the utmost importance to the teaching and learning process. In the absence of these professionals, the interaction between deaf people and hearing people is extremely compromised. Deaf people, by the non-access to the oral language, are confined to participate only partially in different activities. In this sense it is important the teacher has knowledge of sign language, not leaving the communication between deaf and hearing people solely under the responsibility of the interpreter, since the role of that professional is to culturally translate and interpret¹⁵ what is being said from one language to another, as referred by Quadros (2004); Santos e Zandamela (2015).

¹⁵ Translator is the person that translates (an information) from one language to another. Na interpreter is the individual that processes an information given in the source language, makes lexical, structural, semantic and pragmatic choices in the target language and approaches that information as close as possible to the source language.

It is the teacher's responsibility to teach. The deposition clarifies that the absence of a common language between a hearing teacher and a deaf student is detrimental for the student, since he cannot keep contact with the teacher using the same language. It is necessary that the teacher clearly understands the function of the interpreter in class because that professional acts on the moment the teacher is teaching the contents, but when doubts arise it is expected that the teacher can explain directly to the deaf student, asking for help from the interpreter only if necessary (Lacerda, 2017).

Another aspect worthy of attention refers to the creation of new signs, not being clear to which extent these signs are adopted by the deaf community nor if they transmit the intended meaning (Cunha, 2023). Santos e Gurgel (2009, p. 54) explain that "The fragmented and decontextualized educational process faced by the majority of deaf people, frequently allows us to identify, among the deaf educators, a practice for teaching a language that reproduces the precarious education that they had".

The legislation predicts the communicational accessibility for deaf people and recognizes them as speakers of sign language however, it is noticeable that deaf people are still without bilingual LSM interpreters, at EMU. The applicability of the law is necessary to allow the inclusion and above all guarantee the rights of deaf people as citizens.

The fact that the presence of an interpreter in the classroom is legally guaranteed it does not solve the communication between the student and the teacher, unless he is sensitive to the student's linguistic particularity, which did not occur with our subject of investigation. The answer below, shows that reality:

Another problem was that new teachers were unfamiliar with the inclusive teaching model (everything was new to them) thus, few contributed to materialize that initiative... There is a very sad episode that affected pretty bad the deaf students which were the teachers of "General Didactics" (these teachers did not care if the deaf students repeated this class for years) as they argued that interpreters were available and if the deaf students did not understand anything, the problem was the deaf students themselves (I hold resentment even though I never failed that same class) (E1. Ntsumi, 2025).

As it can be inferred from the previous answer, the faculty had limitations in Mozambican sign language as well as the adopted inclusive teaching model, in the frame of the Inclusive Schools Project in 1998. In the "General Didactics" class, in

which there was a high failure rate, the teachers did little to nothing in order for the deaf students to comprehend the contents. In fact, according to the testimony of our interviewee, the teachers expected the deaf students to learn the taught contents without difficulty, since in the classroom, there were interpreters responsible for the translation and interpretation of the information given.

We believe that being a core subject for a student in a teaching degree, a future professional of sign language teaching, it was expected that the interpreters, mediators of this teaching, would master basic concepts that allowed them to translate the contents for the comprehension of the deaf students. And, as it is widely known, the role of the interpreter should not be seen as a translation professional, but someone capable of, more than translating something from the Portuguese Language to Sign Language and vice-versa, culturally mediate the language. Such means that sign language interpreters should not limit themselves to translating contents, but also the culture, the history, the movements, the identity policies and the subjectivity of the language of the deaf (Perlin; Quadros, 2006).

Unfortunately, part of these professionals, including those trained in FACED, had limited mastering and a lack of knowledge of technical terms used by teachers in a classroom while teaching and of the learning process of deaf students, as our interviewee mentioned.

According to Galvão (2017), when referring to the case of a deaf student enrolled in a university degree, it would be relevant that this level of teaching would guide itself by institutional action that would guarantee the hiring of qualified professionals to mediate the communication with deaf people, in a classroom, highlighting the presence of the translators interpreters of Sign Language/Portuguese Language, truly bilingual¹⁶. In this context, this professional would be responsible for participating in the lesson preparation process with the teachers, having previous access to content for reading, understanding and reflecting on the best way to convey meanings and concepts to the deaf students, as well as maintaining a constant dialog with the teachers about the student's academic performance, in a collaborative work.

¹⁶ Fluent command of the source (Sign Language) and target language (Official Language of the Country and teaching).

The precarious provision of this service can hinder or delay the academic performance of deaf students and the successful completion of their degree. These considerations are important in order for universities to better organize their pedagogical spaces, taking into consideration the linguistical and pedagogical specificities of deaf people in the teaching and learning process.

The fact that the degree was introduced in the Eduardo Mondlane University it does not mean that the educational conditions were created. The greatest challenge for Eduardo Mondlane University – specifically FAGED,

To implement strategies that culminate in pedagogical proposals, in which the deaf people can, in an ever-increasing number, have access to Higher Education and that the institutions gather the conditions of structuring the political, didact-pedagogical and organizational bases, contributing to the training of the deaf student [...] (Prates; Manzini, 2020, p. 187–188).

This is the greatest challenge for the university institution, to guarantee the permanence and secure access conditions, which is essential in the inclusion process. It is important to remember that the university has the possibility to help and develop more inclusive proposals.

5 Conclusions

The present study, which ranges from the policy of the inclusive schools project implementation to deaf education in Eduardo Mondlane University has as a goal to reflect on the policies and their applicability in the curriculum of the bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language, in which deaf students are enrolled. To this end, we performed a qualitative analysis of an interpretative nature, carrying out a semi-structured interview to a deaf student of the Bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language.

Based on the analysis we concluded that although a bachelor's degree in Sign Language was introduced at EMU, as a result of the implementation of the Inclusive Schools Project, the interviewed student revealed a lack of knowledge on the legislation that supports the elimination barriers to access higher education, as well as obstacles that prevent him of appropriating knowledge valued by the university.

Content analysis reveals the complex difficulties faced by deaf people in the context of inclusive education in Mozambique, especially in what concerns access to

higher education at EMU, based on the Bachelor's degree in Mozambican Sign Language.

It is evident that the initial lack of knowledge of the "Inclusive Schools" Pilot-Project and the absence of effective policies compromise the full inclusion of deaf people. The account by student Ntsumi highlights the lack of information and the denial of the linguistic and cultural rights, aggravated by the predominance of oralism, that imposes an oral-auditory language for individuals whose linguistic matrix is visuospatial, thus impairing their communication and autonomy.

In addition, the poor training of interpreters and the unfamiliarity of the teachers with sign language as well as the inclusive model hinder the interaction and the learning of the deaf students, building barriers and stories of exclusion. The inadequate use of technical terms by interpreters and the lack of sensitivity by the teachers, create unwelcoming environments, in which the deaf students feel demotivated and isolated.

The distortion and fragmentation of the language, created by oralist practices and by a decontextualized education, reinforce the need to consider deaf people as active subjects and participants in communication and in decisions that affect their lives.

With all in consideration the introduction of the degree at EMU represents a step-forward but does not eliminate the challenges related to the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical accessibility. To ensure an effective inclusion, it is crucial that the university develops strategies that consider training of qualified bilingual interpreters, training of teachers and valuing deaf language and culture.

Only this way it will be possible to not only ensure the access but also the permanence and the academic success of deaf people in higher education, promoting the achievement of their rights and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity in the Mozambican educational context.

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