



Understanding teacher capacity and preparedness in deaf education in Karachi, Sindh

Sindh Education Non-State Actors (SENSA) Programme

Executive summary

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

Overview

This study is part of the third round of qualitative research conducted by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) as part of its technical assistance for Sindh Education through Non-State Actors (SENSA) Programme. The SENSA Programme supports a full cycle of primary education of partner non-governmental organisations in Sindh targeting the poorest, marginalised children in the province’s urban and rural districts. The programme began in July 2016 and is expected to complete in September 2020. One of the key partners in the SENSA Programme is the FESF and their Deaf Reach Programme. The impetus for this study arose from OPM’s technical assistance to Deaf Reach on teacher training and capacity building between 2018 and 2020.

The study aims to inform the research and practice on teacher training, capacity building, and professional development in the Deaf education sector in Pakistan, with a focus on Karachi, Sindh. The study will bridge the gap in the existing literature on teachers of Deaf children in Pakistan, highlighting key issues in preparing teachers to achieve quality teaching and to improve students’ learning outcomes. The findings of the study will inform the work of the provincial government, donors, researchers, and educationists in designing appropriate and effective interventions for supporting the quality and growth of teachers of the Deaf and for achieving better student learning outcomes.

Key players and their functions



Research objectives

The overall purpose of the qualitative research study was to build a better understanding of the preparedness, experiences, and challenges of teachers of Deaf children in Karachi, Sindh. The study identified key areas for improvement in teacher capacity building and professional development in the sector. The specific research objectives of the study were as follows:

- to understand the experiences and challenges of teachers of the Deaf in primary schools;
- to determine teacher perception of preparedness and capacity to teach Deaf children in primary schools;
- to identify strategies and approaches used for teaching Deaf children by teachers in primary schools;
- to gauge the needs of teachers of the Deaf for improving preparedness through training and support to help improve in-service training programmes at Deaf education institutions; and
- to understand parents' expectations and views on teachers of the Deaf in Deaf education institutions.

Approach and methodology

The study focused on teachers of the Deaf in primary schools, working in private and government institutions based in Karachi, Pakistan. The study employed a qualitative research approach and conducted in-depth interviews and key informant interviews as its main data collection tool.

The sample selection was based on an extensive landscape and stakeholder' mapping exercise. The respondents were split into three categories: government, schools, and area experts. The respondents in the school category comprised school management, teachers, and parents; area experts comprised civil society organisations, training institutes, academics, speech therapists, and educationists; and government departments included government officials from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPD), government advisors, and government school management (Table 1).

Table 1: Types of respondent

Type of respondent	Total
Primary school teachers (government and private schools)	15
School management	9
Parents	12
Teacher training institutes ¹	1
Civil society organisations	3
Government officials	3
Academics, speech therapists, and Deaf educationists	4
Total	47

¹ This only includes an institute that conducted teacher training as its primary service. Other organisations interviewed as civil society organisations also provided teacher training services in conjunction with their other programmes.

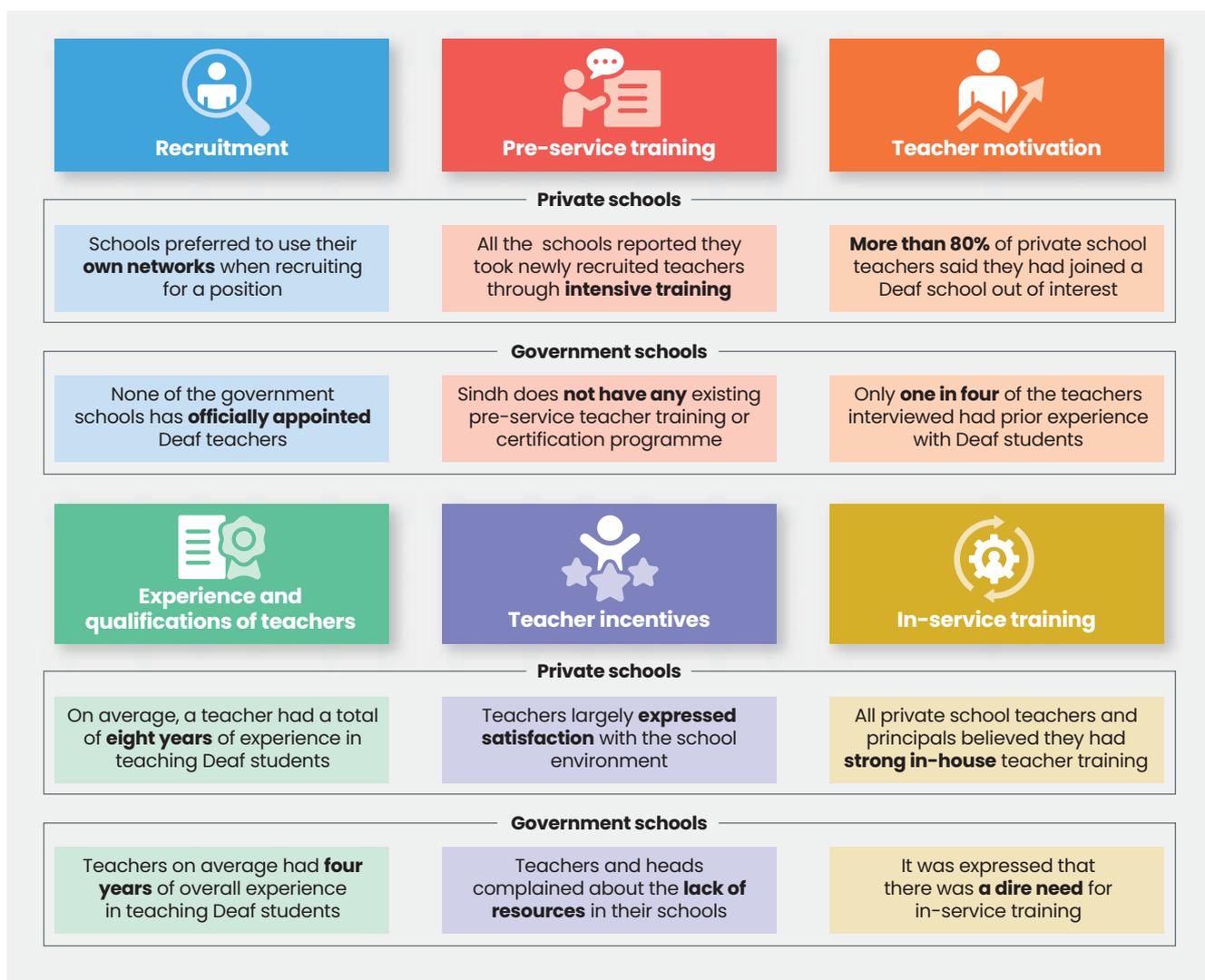
Research findings

The Deaf education landscape

- The fifth Population and Housing Census, conducted in 1998, identified the population of persons with disabilities in Pakistan to be 2.38% of the entire population. However, as per the sixth Population and Housing Census of 2017, the percentage has gone down to less than 0.48%. These low figures can be attributed to the limited definitions of disability and to the questions asked in the census and other large-scale surveys. The 1998 Population Census identified the Deaf population in Sindh as 929,000 persons, while the results of the 2017 Population Census of Pakistan remain provisional and contain no data breakdown by disability. This also highlights the policy and programming challenges in Deaf education owing to inadequate evidence.
- Karachi has seven notable private Deaf schools and three government special schools working towards educating Deaf children. The private schools are almost all non-profit organisations and rely on donor funding and charitable donations. The fee they charge for their education is minimal and scholarships and fee deferrals are common. The government schools exist in the form of large complexes that cater to students with physical and intellectual disabilities; however, classes are held separately for these.
- The local Deaf education sector also has civil society organisations, whose main body of work comprises of advocacy for disability inclusion, initiatives related to employability through vocational training, improvement in Deaf education through lobbying with the government, and the development of Pakistan Sign Language (PSL). Some of these organisations include the Network of Organizations Working with Persons with Disabilities, Danish Kadah, the Pakistan Association of the Deaf, and ConnectHear. While these organisations do offer some training to teachers of the Deaf, they only seem to do so occasionally, as this is not their core function.
- Through this study, we were only able to identify one private sector organisation dedicated to teacher training of special educators, called The Education Foundation. The Education Foundation is not solely dedicated to training teachers of the Deaf; it largely conducts generic training, spanning both physical and intellectual disabilities.
- Overall, a severe lack of teacher training organisations was observed in the sector. There is no dedicated institution working on the development of teachers of the Deaf and supporting the growth of teachers working in the Deaf education sector. Institutions of Deaf education are also not set up to benefit from the research and practice of mainstream education and pedagogy. Government schools currently have no provision of pre-service or in-service teacher training. However, the government is working towards creating a training institute for special educators in Jamshoro, Sindh, and plans to conduct regular teacher training for teachers of the Deaf in the future.
- The government has recently undertaken several public-private initiatives towards the enhancement of the Deaf education sector. One of these is to set up a committee working on the standardisation of sign language that comprises of experienced Deaf teachers from all prominent private schools in Karachi and the Pakistan Association of the Deaf. While the committee has made significant progress, it lacks academic linkages and participation from schools from other parts of Sindh.
- The government has also set up another committee for the standardisation of the curriculum for Deaf students. This is extremely important given that no central curriculum exists at present for Deaf students in the province. Public and private schools tend to make their own adaptation of the provincial curriculum to teach their students. This committee has representation from the heads of special schools throughout Sindh and some private schools.

- DEPD is also reviewing teacher recruitment policies to ensure fair hiring practices in Special Education and to ensure greater numbers of teachers. Discussion on public-private partnerships are being explored where a consortium of private sector organisations with different skills and expertise can come together to support the management and operations of public sector Special Education institutions in Sindh.
- Two universities, Karachi University and Allama Iqbal Open University, are the only academic organisations in Karachi that offer a Masters Programme in Special Education. However, we observed that a large proportion of teachers in our sample who had this Masters degree had chosen to specialise in a disability other than deafness. This could be because of lack of effort in promoting this specialisation.
- There are increasing numbers of collaborative efforts between civil society organisations and private schools and between DEPD and private actors within the sector. However, it was observed that private schools are following a variety of different approaches to Deaf education and there is limited collaboration between them. This may also be due to a sense of competition on quality and resources available in the Deaf education space. This means most private schools have worked on their own variations of student curriculum and teacher training content. The government has a role to play in standardising student learning outcomes for Deaf students and in defining minimum teacher competencies for the sector.

Snapshot: Teachers' professional Journey



Teacher experiences, preparedness, and capacity

- The majority of private school teachers have a minimum of a Bachelors degree and have worked as a teacher for Deaf students for seven years on average. The minimum qualification for the majority of government schoolteachers is a Masters degree, with an average of four years of experience in teaching Deaf children.
- Private schoolteachers largely cited 'personal interest' as a key reason for entering the Deaf education sector, while government schoolteachers entering the profession were attracted by a better pay scale and greater job security. Government schoolteachers working under DEPD in Sindh have higher salaries both compared to teachers at the Sindh Education and Literacy Department and to private school teachers. Moreover, while private school teachers held that their major motivation for teaching at Deaf schools was personal motivation, other reasons could include the significantly larger salaries in private Deaf schools as opposed to regular private schools (the average starting salary at our sample schools was PKR 13,000 per month, whereas average salaries at regular private schools ranged from PKR 2,500 to PKR 5,000 per month).²
- Teachers in government schools currently receive no formal pre-service or in-service training. They have no formal knowledge of PSL and have learned how to communicate with students over time in their informal version of sign language. Moreover, teachers face a constraint in the resources and teaching aids available to them, including textbooks, visual aids, computers, and even insufficient furniture in classrooms. Overall, government schoolteachers did not perceive themselves as prepared to generate optimal learning outcomes in their Deaf students due to the lack of training and resources available to them. There is no support for their growth and development within the school or within the wider DEPD.
- Private school teachers felt there are no major unaddressed challenges in delivering lessons in their classrooms due to the support and in-house training provided to them by their schools. However, they felt that further training in teaching methodologies, subject-based skills, and classroom management could improve their work in improving student learning. Additionally, they felt that access to computers and more teaching aids could help them improve students' learning outcomes.
- Teachers in both private and public schools expressed dissatisfaction at the role played by parents in their Deaf child's life and education. The majority felt parents do not communicate with their Deaf children due to lack of knowledge of PSL, which leads to behavioural problems among Deaf students. The study identified that neither public nor private school teachers had the psychosocial training and awareness to handle these challenges in the classroom.
- School management in government schools expressed satisfaction with their teachers but recognised that the teachers face obstacles in their role because of limited resources and training. The school management also shared their own lack of capacity to support the training of teachers.
- School managements in private schools were largely satisfied with their teachers and credited this to their recruitment processes, in-house training, and teacher management. School heads believed they have been able to inculcate familial environments in their schools that have supported cooperation and collaboration among teachers.
- Area experts shared reservations regarding the preparedness of teachers in both private and public schools to teach Deaf students effectively. They cited lack of formal training and core skills in PSL as the key reasons for this. Some experts expressed that low salaries in the private Deaf schools act as a disincentive for teachers as well.
- Just as the teachers did, area experts believed parents are not playing an adequate role in their Deaf child's education. They cited lack of acceptance of deafness and lack of communication with children as major deficiencies on the part of the parents and believed this leads to student behaviour problems that impact on learning outcomes.

2 M. Azhar, A. Khan, S. Naz, F. Pastakia, A. Rashid, and S. Shah (2014) 'The Voice of Teachers: learning from teachers across Pakistan', Alif Ailaan, available from: www.alifailaan.pk/voice_of_teachers.

Teaching strategies and training

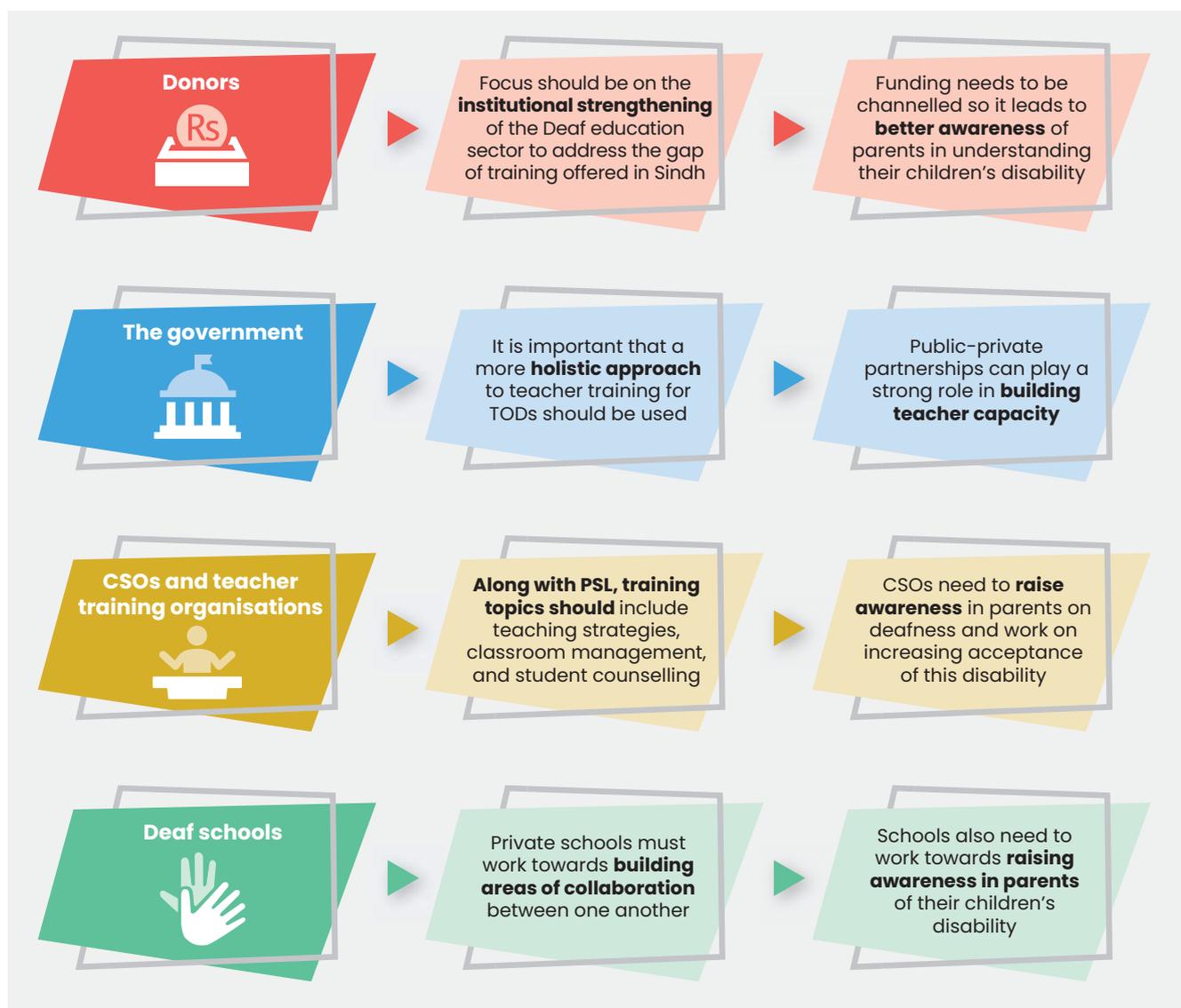
- Most private schools use a ‘total communication’ approach towards Deaf education. This means they use PSL, speech, and visuals while teaching Deaf children. The examples of lessons conducted by teachers show that their classes are more interactive than government schools.
- The government schoolteachers rely more on rote learning where the teacher writes the lesson on the board, signs it (with the informal sign language skills built over time due to experience), and the students copy the work. None of the government schoolteachers had knowledge of PSL.
- Both government and private schools modify the National Curriculum to make it simpler for Deaf students. There is no standardised curriculum being used across government and private schools, hence there are no set benchmarks when it comes to learning outcomes and the requisite teacher competencies.
- Private schools conduct three examinations in an academic year, whereas government schools conduct two. Teachers also conduct revision exercises and classroom tests. However, all these assessment methods are mostly written and mirror the assessments conducted in schools for hearing children. Given these schools focus on children who learn differently from hearing children, schools must approach student assessment in a more innovative manner.
- Area experts felt the inability of teachers to converse fluently in PSL acts as a major deterrent in effective teaching. They felt that, since the teacher is not able to effectively communicate with children, the latter can only acquire limited conceptual understanding and are largely regurgitating lessons without any understanding. Moreover, some area experts were of the opinion that the use of speech in the ‘total communication’ approach practised by schools does not fit the local context, since the majority of students cannot afford hearing aids. Hence, even students with moderate levels of hearing loss rely on sign language and are unable to use their residual hearing.
- Private schools have intensive in-house pre-service and in-service training focusing on developing teachers’ sign language skills. These training programmes are developed and conducted by the school management and the more experienced teachers. A lot of learning is done on the job, initially by shadowing more experienced teachers rather than through formal training activities. Since the training conducted in private schools mainly focuses on sign language, there remains a dearth of formal training focused on pedagogies, classroom management, and student counselling.
- While government schools do not currently have any formal pre-service and in-service teacher training mechanisms, DEPD is in the process of setting up a training centre in Jamshoro, Sindh.
- There is dearth of external organisations with training programmes dedicated to teachers of the Deaf. While civil society organisations such as the Network of Organizations Working with Persons with Disabilities and the Pakistan Association of the Deaf do conduct some teacher training, this is not regular, as training is not the main service they provide. We were only able to identify one functional disability-related private training centre in Karachi, and this did not have any training programmes specific to teachers of the Deaf either.
- While we recognise that private schools have developed strong in-house training systems and have managed to retain teachers and sizeable student enrolment, their overarching focus is on PSL in Deaf education. We recognise the importance of fluency in PSL, but it is equally important for private schools to provide teachers with holistic skills for teaching Deaf students to improve student learning outcomes. This also holds true for the overall narrative of experts within the sector. This narrative, while placing its major focus on PSL, outweighs a holistic view of teacher training with an equal emphasis on building skills in teaching strategies, classroom management, and student counselling. While building PSL fluency is vital for communicating with Deaf students, it is not the only prerequisite to ensure improved learning outcomes and effective teaching in the classroom.

The role of parents in the teacher-student relationship

- Parents were largely satisfied with the schooling their Deaf child is receiving. Discussions with parents indicated lower expectations of the abilities and potential of their Deaf child. This may be due to their lack of awareness, as well as to the larger cultural stereotyping of disability.
- Schools and area experts expressed dissatisfaction with the role played by parents in the education of their Deaf children. They felt parents found it hard to accept their child's disability and did not communicate enough with their children owing to a lack of knowledge of PSL. This led to behavioural problems in Deaf children, such as anger and lack of discipline in the classroom. Most private schools have a parent engagement activity around learning PSL; however, this was not visible in the government schools.

Recommendations

Recommendations for improving Deaf education



For donors

- The scope of training offered within Deaf education institutions and training organisations is limited. Donors can provide support for the growth and development of training platforms and institutions for Deaf education while ensuring that the training curriculum designed and delivered is embedded in holistic methodologies instead of just focusing on PSL. In the government school space, DEPD is taking positive steps forward in some of these areas, but strong donor support is required to systematically expand the base of quality pre-service training for government teachers.
- Donors must also promote evidence-based research and application in the Deaf education space. The diversity of approaches to Deaf education in Karachi indicates incoherence in the quality of education provided to Deaf children. Donors can strengthen this by linking higher education institutions to regional and global centres of research and practice on Deaf education.
- Funding also needs to be channelled towards designing holistic interventions that lead to better awareness of parents to understand their children's disability, identifying the role of parents in the early childhood education of Deaf students, and motivating parents to appreciate the capacities of the Deaf community when it comes to achieving an education, pursuing a livelihood, and contributing to society.
- There is a lack of contextual research to inform teaching methodologies and approaches to Deaf education. Donors can support research to encompass the wider Deaf culture in Pakistan, building an understanding of the use of sign language within the Deaf community in Pakistan, identifying suitable teaching methodologies for the Deaf, and designing interventions to address psychosocial needs of Deaf students. Such studies are extremely important to make the development and standardisation of PSL representative across Sindh.
- A robust and consultative PSL development mechanism that takes into account the capacity, experiences, and challenges of teachers of the Deaf is important.

For the government

- The government needs to support better collaboration and representation across stakeholders in Sindh on understanding the development, application, and use of sign language. This will enrich the language development process and keep it relevant to local needs.
- While DEPD is in the process of creating a training institute in Jamshoro, Sindh, the first set of planned training courses will focus on PSL. It is important to use a more holistic approach to teacher training for teachers of the Deaf. While PSL fluency is an integral part of educating Deaf children, teachers must also be trained on teaching techniques, classroom management, and student counselling, among other aspects of teaching Deaf students.
- DEPD is already partnering with private Deaf schools and plans to conduct a school adoption initiative whereby a consortium of private Deaf schools can adopt several government schools. As the government capacity is severely limited, public-private partnerships are needed to expand the capacity of the sector to develop quality teachers and to achieve better student learning outcomes.
- The standardisation of the curriculum and student learning outcomes is necessary for government policymakers to build a benchmark for recruiting and training teachers.

For civil society organisations and teacher training organisations

- Civil society organisations and teacher training organisations must not restrict their discourse around teacher preparedness to fluency in PSL. Instead, they should expand it to include other areas of teacher competency, including teaching strategies, classroom management, and student counselling, which are critical to the pedagogy of Deaf students. It is important to ensure that all initiatives towards building teacher capacity have a holistic approach to the needs of teacher, students, and Deaf schools.
- Civil society organisations need to raise awareness in parents on deafness and work on increasing acceptance of this disability in hearing parents of Deaf students. The study points to a possible lack of communication, understanding, and acceptability of Deaf children among their hearing parents. Civil society organisations need to design these programmes and, in doing so, to collaborate with other area experts.
- Research work on understanding Deaf culture and the use of sign language is valuable for supporting the PSL development process. Better contextual understanding of the use and application of PSL in institutions and Deaf communities across Sindh will also help improve representation from schools and practitioners throughout Sindh in PSL development.

For Deaf schools

- Private schools must work towards building areas of collaboration between one another to prevent the duplication of efforts and resources.
- Schools also need to work towards raising awareness in parents of their children's disability. While private schools already assist parents in learning sign language, more work needs to be done to develop parental understanding of deafness and the capacity of their children for leading normal lives. They must be made aware of the role they can play in inculcating confidence and self-belief in their Deaf children, while preventing behavioural problems such as frustration and anger that affect performance in school and long-term learning.

