**Imogen**

**Level 2 EPQ**

**Project Proposal Form**

**Learner Name: Imogen Whelan**

**Centre Name : Putney High School**

**Teacher Assessor :**

**Unit: Dissertation**

**Learner number :**

**Centre number :**

**Date:**

**Proposed project title : “** How can we improve language teaching/learning in UK schools, including BSL?”

**Section One : Title, objective, responsibilities:**

**Objectives :**

* To find out the failings of language teaching in the UK
	+ Break down in early years, primary, secondary
* To explore how we can improve it and the barriers to achieving this
* To discuss how BSL can be taught more in schools
	+ To explore how BSL can be implemented at different educational stages
* To explore the benefits of more BSL learning in the UK

**Section Two: Reasons for choosing this project:**

I currently study two modern foreign languages at GCSE; French and German, and love the linguistic awareness from these languages I can obtain and apply to my English studies. My secondary school makes learning a language compulsory at GCSE level, but am aware of many schools within the UK that do not follow this approach. I believe language learning is a vital skill all should have the opportunity to be taught if we wish to have a more united world; communication with one and other and diverse cultural awareness is essential for progression on a global scale.

In September, as I began to think of a title for this EPQ project, I realised that British Sign Language is a language used by so many people, yet is almost exclusively only taught to the deaf or hard of hearing community. I became aware of the plethora of inclusion and linguistic benefits this language can create if taught widely in schools. It was evident that the teaching of sign language to a high level was not a prevalent part of the curriculum in schools around the globe, provoking me to want to delve deeper into the cognitive and educational benefits of treating BSL as a widely spoken language in the UK curriculum.

From my research, I hope to gain a greater knowledge of how British Sign Language works, and look forward to discussing with Fia about her findings on modern foreign language teaching.

**Section Three: Activities and timescales:**

**Timescale:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Section** | **How long? (Exc. Hols)** | **Target date** | **Notes** | **Amendments** |
| Project planning | 4 weeks | 5/11/21 | By this point we should have completed the project proposal form including decided on sub-topics, planned timescales, planned work division, and written up reasons for doing the project.  |   |
| Research - secondary | 13 weeks  | 11/03/22 | We should have collated all of our research while recording initial thoughts, and logging key features of the sources.I will use resources such as scholarly articles, news articles and books, and log these in my Activity Log. By this time, we ideally should have read/analysed all of our secondary resources, and have discussed them with each other. Our individual introductions should be drafted.  |  Date changed from 10/12/21 to 11/03/22 |
| Research - primary | 4 weeks | 25/03/22 | During this period, we should work to find primary resources, whether it be a modern foreign language teacher we can interview, a hearing impaired or deaf person (who regularly uses BSL) or a survey/form we can send to the school. At the end of the research section we should have an understanding of what our arguments and conclusions will be. |  Date changed from 28/01/22 to 25/03/22 |
| Writing |  8 weeks(not including half term and end of year exams)  | 22/04/22  | This is when we will write up the body of our essay in individual sections, separately in paragraphs based on the premises we were researching. |    |
| Editing  | Over the summer and the beginning of Autumn term 2022. | 08/07/2022 | This is the time allowed for refining and proofreading our essay. |   |
| Review | Over the summer and the beginning of Autumn term 2022. | To be finished by 23/09/2022 | This is when we will write our review, assessing what did and didn’t go well in our project.  |   |

**Group responsibilities:**

* We will discuss and share our research and resources on a regular basis, and have conversations about our findings.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imi: | Fia:  |
| BSL teaching in schools, benefits | Failings of UK system, successes of eu system |

**Section 4: Resources:**

We will gather newspaper articles with a range of facts and opinion.

We will ideally interview someone as our primary resource , or send out a google form.

We will use the school library and the internet, including various websites such as jstor and the BBC

We may draw from personal experience of the uk language education system.

We will try to interview language teachers at school.

Our research will cover:

Best language teaching practices

Failings of the U.K. language learning system.

How to teach BSL

The benefits of more widespread BSL knowledge.

Research record sheet

**Secondary research:**

**Title: ‘The study and use of sign language’**

**URL/location:** Stokoe, William C. “THE STUDY AND USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE.” Sign Language Studies, no. 10, Gallaudet University Press, 1976, pp. 1–36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26203115>

**What is it:** A segment from an academic journal.

**Who produced it:** William C. Stokoe

**Date:** 1976

**Summary:**

The article begins by highlighting the origins of Sign Language in America, and its connections to the deaf community in a short, historical perspective segment. Stokoe then outlines the purpose of the article, which will be focusing on ASL (American Sign Language). We learn about how deaf people receive sign language and use it alongside oral methods such as lip reading. We learn about the distinction between lip reading and sign language; while both utilise sight, sign language does not consist of processing different vowels and consonants that make up words (unless finger spelling is used). Sign language works as any other language does in that it is impossible to literally translate every sign word-for-word into English. Additionally, translation of words in sign languages is dependent on context. This contrasts with people’s general assumption that sign language originated as a direct translation of English words into sign. Sign language is then described as an “encoding device”, and is able to be learned with ease. This is how sign is often taught to hearing people; by pairing signs with English words, as it is the most convenient/ fast/ easy way to become competent with sign language. Stokoe does argue that this “sign-encoding” is not the most effective way to learn sign language with fluency. Instead, he proposes sign language is treated as a true language, by which a learner begins learning sign by first ensuring they are able to effectively receive signs (preferably from a deaf person) before communicating the signs. Stokoe then goes on to debunk the claim that sign language has no grammatical or syntactical rules – it is like any other language with its own, unique lexicons etc. Stokoe resolves this section with the conclusion that sign has “just as much grammatical structure as English”. Sign has its own rules, vocabulary and lexicon, and like all languages, differs from the lexicon of English. An interesting point raised by Stokoe was that sign language is used mainly as a visible aid for an observer to detect one is deaf or hard-of-hearing, and not using sign language (mostly) leaves a deaf person’s disability undetected. We then learn about the purpose of sign language among the deaf community; that it, like any common language, is a means of uniting groups of people. The use of Sign language does provide cultural entertainment for the deaf community, in the form of artistic expression (such as in theatre). At the time the article was written, Stokoe mentions that many schools and even parents of deaf children reject sign language (thus denying them of being involved in deaf culture). In essence, sign language has its own culture and community, however small, and should therefore be treated as a true language.

Note- this summary is not a summary of all points made in the entire 39 pages of this article- I have only summarised parts of it I deem to be an aid to my project.

**Purpose:**

The purpose (of the parts of the article I was interested in) was to inform people of basic grammatical structure of sign language, to debunk views that sign language is not a real/valid language, to inform the reader on some of the culture surrounding sign language in the deaf community and to draw parallels between spoken English and sign language.

**Reliability:** After briefly researching William C.Stokoe, I deem this author to be reliable, as 1) The article is embedded with multiple references to back up Stokoe’s claims, 2) The article has been taken from an academic institution ( Gallaudet University Press) and 3) William Stokoe was a professor, focusing on American Sign Language – he was recognised for his research into proving that sign language is a ‘real’ language. He has a biography on the Gallaudet University Press website, showing he was a valued and influential professor. Also, the Gallaudet University Press was mentioned by Barbara Cooper (a kindergarten teacher) in “The Reading Teacher, Vol.56, No.2”, as a place for people to purchase children’s books that are accompanied with signed illustrations.

**Relevance:** The article was written in 1976, over 40 years ago- we have to keep in mind that data mentioned is not necessarily applicable to society now. Not all 39 pages of the article were relevant. For example, many of the diagrams looking at the science behind the formation of sign language were 1) Too complicated for me to understand and 2) Not relevant to the premise of my project, as I’m looking into whether sign language should be widely introduced into the (UK) school system; not the in-depth linguistic analysis of the language. In addition, this linguistic analysis only applies to ASL- not BSL, which is what I am focusing on.

**Limitations:** It is hard to find the source of factual references as the article was written such a long time ago. I have to be wary with what I quote, as situations could have changed/progressed since the time the article was written.

**Title: ‘Should pupils have to learn sign language?’**

**URL/location:** [should pupils learn sign language - bbc](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38979904)

**What is it:** A news article

**Who produced it:** Katherine Sellgren, from the BBC

**Date:** 15th March 2017

**Summary:** Many young deaf children (interviewed in the article) view sign language as an opportunity to remove obstacles when trying to make friends and communicate with the world. Highgate Primary School (a school for hearing children l) and Blanche Neville School (a school for deaf children ) work in partnership to integrate learning in BSL between both deaf and hearing children. Although recognised as an official language in 2003, BSL is not incorporated into the National Curriculum , and it is up to schools whether they choose to teach it. The article described benefits of learning sign language, such as breaking down communication and social barrier between deaf and hearing people, and even aiding hearing people in expressing themselves more freely and creatively. On the other hand, the Department of Education has stated that schools are free to teach BSL should they wish, but it has not been incorporated into the national curriculum for practical reasons (BSL is allegedly too much to add into a packed curriculum). In the video (embedded in the article), a short point about the mental toll of communication barriers between deaf and hearing people is raised, and how this inability to communicate can often lead to isolation.

**Purpose:** To give an insight into the opinions of both deaf and hearing people on the benefits of learning BSL, and to inform us of explanations as to why BSL has not been made a compulsory subject on the national curriculum

**Reliability:** This source is very reliable, as the BBC is a trusted news source, read by millions of people on a daily basis worldwide. Therefore, as it reaches many people, it is under constant scrutiny so false news is often quickly detected. The article includes real life, primary evidence in the form of interviews with deaf and hearing children, which gives a truthful perspective on BSL learning. In addition, the article provides both sides of the argument, so is not clouded by bias. Although, there is much more evidence supporting that pupils should learn sign language than that they shouldn’t.

**Relevance:** The article is relevant to my project, as it focuses on arguments for and against teaching BSL in the UK (which is what I am focusing on looking into for the BSL sections of my project). The article was written in 2017, relatively recently, although it has almost been 5 years since the article was written, and there is no guarantee that people’s opinions haven’t changed since 2017. Additionally, the article looks into the perspective of children and teachers, who are in the British education system, aiding the relevance of the source as it has statements to back up it’s claims.

**Limitations:** The article has few limitations, but the arguments do lean more towards benefits of learning BSL as opposed to disadvantages. (Which is good for my project!).

**Title: British Sign Language – an inferior form of communication to spoken language?**

**URL/location:** <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi71ovSh4z2AhWNT8AKHf_jDRIQFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbabelzine.co.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F07%2FNo4-Article-British-Sign-Language.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1upCTEsoByWUMLOLE8xN0j>

**What is it:** A language magazine article (winner of a competition)

**Who produced it:** Kateryna Pavlyuk

**Date:** August 2013

**Summary:** As a result of BSL being regarded as a minority language, being in used in the same community as English (regarded globally as one of the ‘universal languages’), and creating a visual (rather than auditory output), it is uncommon for BSL to be acknowledged as a ‘real’ language. \* BSL was only recognised as an official language in 2003 \*Interestingly, the article also raises the point of a greater generational gap existing in sign language that is not as prevalent in spoken languages. This is due to changing attitudes in how deaf people are encouraged to communicate now compared to before the 1940s. Before the 1940s, sign was mainly taught via finger spelling and lip-reading; now the teaching of established BSL signs is fostered. Therefore nowadays there is a communication gap between older sign-language using communities and more recently born sign language users, and old fashioned signs exist for things that have technologically advanced. (Not so relevant)

“Signs often express meaning far more succinctly than corresponding speech” – BSL does not distinguish between “he” and “she”( so do other languages, such as Finnish, Chinese and Estonian) – more inclusive… non-binary friendly language?

“BSL…is able to specify within the pronoun sign how many individuals are being referred to” e.g “WE-TWO, WE-THREE ETC.” Easier to convey meaning when young children are communicating and could be distressed.

* Regional difference in BSL dialects

**Purpose:** To argue that BSL is “in no way inferior to spoken language”

**Reliability:** Kateryna is not an expert in the subject matter, although the article appears to have been researched thoroughly. Additionally, at the time the article was written, the writer was still in school and studying A-levels, meaning the article should not be used like an encyclopaedic source.. However, Kateryna did win a competition to have their article published, so I presume it must have been assessed by language experts in order for it to published in a magazine that specialises in languages. On the other hand, this is just an assumption.

**Relevance:** Argument is relevant to the premise of my project. 2013 was relatively recently. Lots of content in this artcile was covered in the study and use of sign language, which demonstrates how this view on BSL as a legitimate language is shared by others, thus increasing the legitimacy of the author’s argument.

**Limitations:** Doesn’t mention how BSL could be incorporated into the curriculum (unlike my essay question). However, the evidence in this article has given me a greater understanding of BSL as a language and has offered some basic insight into how it works linguistically.

**Title: The use of sign language to teach reading to kindergarteners.**

**URL/location:** [**https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20205161.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A2958de4930d9be356a6357f1a8e6267a&ab\_segments=&origin=**](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20205161.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A2958de4930d9be356a6357f1a8e6267a&ab_segments=&origin=)

**What is it:** An extract from “The Reading Teacher, Vol.56, No.2”

**Who produced it:** Barbara Cooper

**Date:** October 2002

**Summary:**

How do they teach it in the classroom?:

The author of this article incorporates both sign language (ASL) and finger spelling while teaching literacy and reading to kindergarteners (equivalent in the UK is year 1). From the second day the kindergarteners enter elementary school, this teacher pairs letters in words with their corresponding sign, providing children with a kinaesthetic, multi sensory way to recall new, unfamiliar words, aiding their early phonetic and literacy studies. This teacher uses “finger spelling and signing not only while reading books but also throughout the context of the kindergarten day”( page 117, Teaching Ideas). Throughout the school year, Barbara incorporates sign language into her students’ lessons, mainly helping them with heir language arts studies (language arts= “the subjects (such as reading, spelling, literature, and composition) that aim at developing the student's comprehension and capacity for use of written and oral language” -Merriam-Webster.

Benefits of doing so:

1. Motivation to learn
2. Faster learning speed: “Signing games capture the attention of all of the children and do not leave the slower visual learners out of the fun of reading” page 118, Teaching Ideas chapter. Children who are usually slower at “visual encoding and decoding” find that using sign language is a great asset in an area they would otherwise find extremely challenging.

“Children acquire words more quickly and retain them longer” page 119. Speeds up learning process. Chain effect; faster learning speed= more impressed parents=more parental engagement=even more motivation for the children to learn.

1. Parental engagement
2. Benefits **all** learners: students who find reading comes naturally can engage their brains with a new language tool, while also helping those who struggle with reading.
3. Easier for teachers to assess the ability of the class
4. Engages different part of the brain
5. Children have a greater appreciation for the hard-of-hearing community; less of a stigma surrounding those who seem different. As they grow up, this leads to them becoming “more comfortable interacting with children with disabilities” p119

**Purpose:**

To share how sign language and finger spelling can be beneficial in teaching literacy, phonics and written communication skills to 5/6 year olds in an elementary school setting.

**Reliability:**

This article was written in 2002 (20 years ago); it is unclear how long Cooper has been teaching for. When researching Barbara Cooper, I could not find her on any academic/university/scholarly internet pages. However much of the article draws from Barbara’s own experience teaching, which would obviously not require any doctorates or extensive qualifications in order to dictate. But her observations are not backed up by numerical evidence.

**Relevance:**

 I have been unable to find much information on Barbara Cooper. As the journal was written 20 years ago, it is unclear whether Barbara Cooper is still teaching or is even alive. However this doesn’t take away from the fact that the journal raises many relevant points about the benefits of utilising sign language in the classroom, and has provoked me to link the evidence from this article to the hypothesis of my project. It seems that sign language learning is extremely beneficial for early-year learning, but perhaps will not have as many benefits if it were taught along side secondary school aged children, as they would have presumably obtained basic literacy skills and will therefore not need to use BSL as a prevalent reading tool.

**Limitations:**

Focuses on 5 and 6 year olds; the essay question I wish to answer focuses mainly on secondary school teaching. Despite this, I can still reference the benefits of sign language as a teaching tool for this age group, and can reference this source when coming to a conclusion about how sign language should be taught in schools. Also, the journal is written from the perspective of an American teacher; I am strictly focusing on the UK. However, the American early years language arts learning programme seems to have similar aims to UK literacy curriculum in year1/reception; to improve reading, writing and general communication skills (from my own experience in the system).

**Title: British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate**

**URL/location:** [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)

**What is it:** A filmed UK Parliamentary debate

**Who produced it:** UK Parliament

**Date:** 06/03/2018

**Summary:** MP’s debated whether BSL should become a part of the national curriculum. Almost unanimously, Ministers agreed that BSL should be offered as a GCSE subject. A BSL GCSE would enable deaf children to gain a qualification in their first language and also be offered to hearing children. This qualification would enable hearing children to become sign language interpreters, who are very much needed in the UK.

Since BSL was recognised as an official language in 2003, it has not been given the same weighting as other languages. There is also a shortage in qualified teachers of deaf people. The department of Education have not allowed BSL to be taught as a GCSE, despite a full GCSE having been piloted by Signature. Some argue that the fact BSL is not a GCSE implies the government does not value the deaf community as much as hearing people. On the other hand, there are different BSL qualifications available, such as “The Level 1 and 2 qualifications offered by the Institute of British Sign Language, Signature and ABC awards. These can be taught in schools. People can take further to level 3 and 4 and even level 6, which is equivalent to a degree. Making a BSL GCSE “ is not a simple process” (Nick Gibb, the Minister of State for School Standards).

Learning BSL would improve social economic opportunities for hard of hearing people, and make our society much more inclusive.

**Reliability:** Many points mentioned by ministers were backed up with relevant data from sources such as the National Deaf Children’s Society and the British Deaf Association, which are both organisations that specialise in improves the lives of deaf people. However, it is important to note that some of the evidence given by MPs may be inaccurate, which I will try not to include in my project.

**Relevance:** This source will provide a different medium of research as it is in video form. It also links with the lack of interpreters article, as a lack of interpreters is mentioned in the debate. While not the entire view was relevant, I think it gave me some great reference points, such as the counter arguments for adding a BSL GCSE into the curriculum.

**Limitations:** As this is a spoken source, there is no guarantee that references made are not exaggerated in some way in order to persuade people to agree with one particular side of the argument. This source has few limitations in elation to my project as I can use it to present differing viewpoints on including a BSL GCSE in the National Curriculum.

**Title: Coronavirus: Lack of sign language interpreters leads to legal case against government**

**URL/location:** [**https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-52323854**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-52323854)

**What is it:** News article

**Who produced it:** Beth Rose from BBC Ouch

**Date:** 28/04/2020

**Summary:** Lack of interpreters in the lates COVID-19 government daily press briefings. Lynn Stewart-Taylor; “panicked, worried”. She struggled to read the subtitles because she regards BSL “as her first language” and “has an “average reading age of seven years old”.

**Purpose:** To inform the public of the problem of a lack of sign interpreters.

**Reliability:** The BBC is a trusted news source as it is read daily by millions globally, therefore it is under constant scrutiny so false information is more likely to be called out.

**Relevance:** Provides another reason as to why BSL needs to be taught in schools, which is relevant to the benefits of teaching and learning BSL section of my project.

**Limitations:** There are no statistics- the article is based solely on word of mouth from interviews conducted by the BBC.

**Primary research:**

**Title: Language teaching in the UK**

**URL/location:** [**https://gdsto365-my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/f\_henderson\_put\_gdst\_net/ESMaKGZv\_tpIlMzpDdWjyW8BggKZ\_MsEgtNplz36Dbm27Q?email=i.whelan%40put.gdst.net&e=2i3suY**](https://gdsto365-my.sharepoint.com/%3Ax%3A/g/personal/f_henderson_put_gdst_net/ESMaKGZv_tpIlMzpDdWjyW8BggKZ_MsEgtNplz36Dbm27Q?email=i.whelan%40put.gdst.net&e=2i3suY)

**What is it:** A google form interpreted in an excel spreadsheet

**Who produced it:** Fia Henderson and Imogen Whelan

**Date:** 04/03/2022

**Summary:** Fia and I created a multiple choice google form consisting of 12 questions which we sent out to our school via Dr Mellor. We received 241 responses, as we promoted our survey by going through the different classrooms in our school and asking people to fill in the form during lunch. 38.1% of the 241 responses from out school (all year groups) consider themselves bilingual.

On an enjoyment scale of 1-5; (1 being the least enjoyable and 5 being the most enjoyable), an average of 3.1 was submitted for French enjoyment. On a knowledge scale of 1-5 (1 being the participant knows nothing and 5 being the participant knows a lot), 68.6% of participants put 1 when asked ‘How much British Sign Language do you know? Only 1 participant put 5 (0.4§) , 1.2% of participants put 4, 5% of participants put 3 and 24.8% of participant put 2. This demonstrates that the majority of people in my school have no knowledge of sign language, and only around a fifth know basic signs.



**Purpose:** To gain an insight into how our school views language learning, and to gather the opinions of students . In this summary I have only included the data relevant to the BSL section of the project.

**Reliability:** I deem our data to be reliable as it is a primary source, and has been crafted by myself and Fia.

**Relevance:** As we were able to craft the questions ourselves, all data collected is relevant to either Fia’s or my section of the project.

**Limitations:** Due to time constraints, I was unable to ask any teachers about their opinion on possibly teaching BSL. This source will not help to support the cognitive benefits of language learning sections of my project, as I need to interpret secondary scientific data carried out by people with more resources than I, a secondary school student, has.

**Title: Questions posed to staff at Putney High School relating to language teaching**

**URL/location:** No URL but I am inserting a copy of the questions asked here:

If you grew up speaking another language in a foreign country, how quickly did you become proficient in speaking English ? Do you notice any differences between how English and modern foreign languages are taught abroad and how modern foreign languages are taught in the UK?

Have you noticed a stigma surrounding language learning in the UK?

Do you feel that you are respected more/less as a language teacher in comparison to teachers of other subjects?

**What is it:** Via email, Fia and I collected the responses of various MFL teachers at our school to questions we sent them (through our supervisor, Herr Yates)

**Who produced it:** Fia Henderson and Imogen Whelan

**Date:** 21/03/2022 (date sent to staff)

**Results (responses that could relevant to my section of the project)**

Mrs Fennell:

**Have you noticed a stigma surrounding language learning in the UK?**

There does seem to be a priority placed on Maths and Science in general, as a way for students to secure the ‘best’ career opportunities. We have had GCSE and A level students who loved languages but have chosen Maths/Science moving forward because they think they should. Where at all possible, students should study what they love. Brexit created an uncomfortable tension around modern language learning for a time.

Sra Castro:

**Have you noticed a stigma surrounding language learning in the UK?**

A bit, some parents would say that languages are not important and they transfer this idea to their children, who feel that they can focus on other subjects, as they already speak English, which is considered by many the international language.

**Do you feel that you are respected more/less as a language teacher in comparison to teachers of other subjects?**

I feel respected but at the same time I feel that many people think that foreign languages are not so important.

Sra Ladra:

**Have you noticed a stigma surrounding language learning in the UK?**

I wouldn't say there is a stigma, but generally speaking English speaking people do not feel the need to learn a foreign language as English is the most spoken language in the world.Furthermore**,**only having 3 choices at A levels, makes choosing a language very hard if you have a particular career in mind, say Medicine.

**Do you feel that you are respected more/less as a language teacher in comparison to teachers of other subjects?**

In a ranking order I would say that Maths and English are generally considered the most important subjects to excel at. Having said that, I do feel respected and valued in Putney and I do get the feeling that a lot of colleagues would love to learn a foreign language.

**Random links and quotes (not all relevant to or included in my essay)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author name | Publication/Publisher  | Date Written/Published | Comments and notes |
| Don’t neglect the UK’s indigenous languages | Rhona  | The Guardian | 29/10/2013 | “There are 10 indigenous languages being spoken today in the British Isles”; these are: English, Scots, British Sign Language, Welsh, Gaelic, Irish, Cornish, Manx, Angloromani and Shelta”Not something that will actively promote inclusivity and diversity within the UK. I will not research this topic any further. .  |
| Sign language and Makaton in primary schools  | The school run.com | the school run.com | unknown  | BSL is the main language of around 145,000 people in the UL. SSE: Sign Supported English: can be taught along side hearing inspire and hearing people: can learn English grammar along side.Makaton and other sign languages are a great way of learning non-verbal communication methods. Children w/ special needs can feel more accepted.Source: not so reliable as no author known, so I have decided to not use this in my essay. .  |
| The Study and Use of Sign Language | William C.StokoeWidely recognised as the creator of linguistic study of the sign languages of the deaf.WAS NOT DEAF – but was widely recognised as a sign language researcher. American  | Gallaudet University Press | 1976 | -took a long time to read- 39 pages, but proved to be a really useful source.- is a language that solely relies on the use of sight- most deaf people already have to study English along with sign language, as it is “the language in which deaf person achieve higher education “. - like all other languages, no word to word translation of sign language will exactly equate to the same phrase/grammatical output. “Sign as an encoding device “.- can easily be taught in schools from a young age… “Can be memorised in a relatively short time and with practice enable the learner to make normal spoken utterances visible to deaf persons “.The claim that sign language is ungrammatical is false – “uncorrected by any real knowledge about language” (although is widely believed)-Sign has its own rules, vocabulary and lexicon, and like all languages, differs from the lexicon of English. “Sign has just as much grammatical structure as English”. Has a very unusual structure and system that challenges all theories of grammar – interesting to implement in schools - could highlight similarities vs difference of the BSL language system vs the English language system and could make people genuinely interested in linguistic study !“The elect said of a sign language can with exposure and use become clear and understandable to anyone who can see” “One of the most important uses of language is the formation and preservation of social groups”“Having a common language joins people with the strongest of bonds”“Sign language users too have artistic forms of expression, and themes to express in them”.Has its own culture + community – therefore should be treated as a language.  |
| How to teach…sign language  | Emily Drabble  | The Guardian  | 15/07/2013 | <https://www.theguardian.com/education/teacher-blog/2013/jul/15/deafness-sign-language-teaching-resources?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other>“has been associated with enhanced results in literacy, particularly for more kinaesthetic learners.”“British sign language (BSL) was recognised by the government as a language in its own right in March 2003”Define kinaesthetic learners in glossary of terms / appendix  |
| Should pupils have to learn sign language ? | Katherine Sellgren | The BBC | 15 March 2017 | [should pupils learn sign language - bbc](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38979904)“A chance to break down barriers and make new friends”. “Can help hearing people express themselves more freely”.“40% of deaf children experience mental health problems, compared to 25% of hearing children). “90% of deaf children have hearing parents”.  |
| British Sign Language – an inferior form of communication to spoken language?  | Kateryna Pavlyuk  | Babble Magazine  | 2013 | <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi71ovSh4z2AhWNT8AKHf_jDRIQFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbabelzine.co.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F07%2FNo4-Article-British-Sign-Language.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1upCTEsoByWUMLOLE8xN0j>BSL= “fourth most spoken language in the UK” as of 2013“Before the 1940s, sign language was taught through lip-reading and finger spelling, however now signers are encouraged to develop and learn established sign instead. “ |
| <https://bda.org.uk/help-resources/> | N/A | British Deaf Association  | N/A | “the preferred language of over 87,000 deaf people in the UK” |
| <https://www.signature.org.uk/british-sign-language-level-2-certificate/> | N/A | Signature | N/A  | Costs from £40.00 to access learning/ homework resources for their Level 2 (supposedly GCSE level) course.  |

**Imogen Whelan Level 2 EPQ**

**“How can we improve language teaching and learning in UK schools, including BSL?”**

**How can we improve BSL teaching and learning in UK schools?**

**Introduction:**

As I study two modern foreign languages at GCSE (French and German), and thoroughly enjoy the general linguistic skills I obtain from my studies, I chose to relate my Extended Project Qualification to languages. I am lucky to have been able to study multiple languages at school , but recognise that, for the majority of pupils in the UK, continuing a modern foreign language to GCSE level is voluntary, and often stigmatised; “ some parents say that languages are not important and they transfer this idea to their children”[[1]](#footnote-1). Furthermore, languages have been traditionally seen as less valuable for future careers.

There are significant benefits of learning languages to a high standard especially in global terms, if we wish to become unified and have a true appreciation of the cultures of our diverse world. I will explore how we can incorporate the study of BSL into the UK curriculum, in order to promote inclusivity and sensitivity to as many groups of people as possible. I felt that it would be important to not exclusively focus on improving language education for hearing people (as Fia will be doing) without acknowledging BSL and the cognitive and social benefits that arise from both hearing and deaf people learning sign language. Watching Rose Ailing Ellis (a deaf candidate on the popular BBC programme, “ Strictly Come Dancing”), has inspired me to consider a deaf person’s experience in the world, and provoked me to question why BSL is not widely taught in primary and or secondary schools.

I will be undertaking both primary and secondary research into how learning BSL comes with a plethora of benefits. I will also look into how BSL could be incorporated into the curriculum, and whether it should be introduced as a GCSE. This will support Fia’s research into how Modern Foreign Language Learning can be improved in the UK. Mostly, I will focus on exploring how BSL teaching can be made possible up to and including GCSE level in the United Kingdom. I am interested to observe links between benefits of learning BSL in both hearing and deaf people, and look forward to taking part in this project with Fia.

**Glossary of terms**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **BSL** | *British Sign Language*  |
| **ASL** | *American Sign Language*  |
| **Kinaesthetic learner** | *A term used to describe people who need to use tactile and multi sensory methods to learn most efficiently.*  |
| **Kindergarten** | *Reception equivalent in America* |

**Benefits of teaching and learning BSL**

**Linguistically complex**

William C.Stokoe (widely regarded as the creator of linguistic study of the sign languages of the deaf) states in, “The Study and Use of Sign Language”, that “Sign has just as much grammatical structure as English”[[2]](#footnote-2). Sign language is also an incredibly complex language. It has its own rules, vocabulary and lexicon and, like all other languages, differs from the lexicon of English. Additionally, sign language works as any other language does in that it is impossible to literally translate every sign word-for-word into English, and it is greatly dependent on context. This proves that learning sign language is intellectually challenging and stimulating, and therefore would be a valuable subject to learn in schools.

**Lack of interpreters**

As “the preferred language of over 87,000 deaf people in the UK”,[[3]](#footnote-3) demand for BSL interpreters and further accessibility for users of the language is ever increasing[[4]](#footnote-4). This demand was seen to have been particularly inflated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when vital public health briefings were being aired to the entire population. Initially, there were no BSL interpreters at these briefings; it took a twitter campaign and a legal case for the government to finally introduce an interpreter. The repercussions of this initial absence of BSL interpreters was felt by Lynn Stewart Taylor, a deaf person, who regards BSL “as her first language”. Although subtitles were available, Lynn struggled to read them, describing herself as having “an average reading age of seven years old”, leaving her extremely “panicked” and “worried”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

If BSL were to be taught in schools, one would expect that more interpreters would surface [[6]](#footnote-6) hence, in times of public emergency (such as in a global pandemic) , primary users of BSL would not be subject to such stress. In 2018, a crucial debate on this matter occurred in parliament, during which Ministers speculated as to whether BSL should be taught in schools, or introduced as a GCSE option[[7]](#footnote-7). Many Ministers argued that, if BSL was to be introduced as a GCSE option, this would lead to a natural progression of more people training to be BSL interpreters in the future. The more qualified BSL interpreters there are, the more deaf people will be able to participate in society, get jobs, be informed of current affairs and socialise. It is evident that teaching BSL in schools is an argument worth having, and that many people, more recently members of the British government, deem BSL to be a beneficial possible addition to the British education system.

**Beneficial for all learners**

A need for more BSL interpreters is not the only reason I argue for BSL to be taught in schools. In fact, broadly teaching sign language does not only benefit the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Barbara Cooper in “The Reading Teacher, Vol.56,No.2” describes how she uses sign language to aid the teaching of language arts to her hearing kindergarten class, and the plethora of benefits of doing so. Through incorporating both ASL and finger spelling while teaching literacy and reading to her 5/6 year old students, children are provided with a kinaesthetic way to recall new, unfamiliar words, aiding their early phonetic and literacy studies. This method appears to benefit all learners. For example, students who have a naturally higher reading proficiency can exercise a different part of their brains with a new language, and children who are usually slower at recalling the appearance of words on a page are able to “acquire words more quickly and retain them longer”[[8]](#footnote-8) Further, Cooper believes her students have a greater appreciation for the hard-of-hearing community and this teaching method means there is less of a stigma surrounding those who have been rendered ‘different’ by our society . As they grow up, this leads to her students becoming, “more comfortable interacting with children with disabilities.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

This observation is supported by a more recent article published by the BBC In 2017.[[10]](#footnote-10) The article illustrates how High Gate Primary School (a mainstream school) and Blanche Neville School (for deaf children) work in partnership to integrate BSL learning between both deaf and hearing children . Although recognised as an official language in 2003 by the UK government[[11]](#footnote-11), BSL is not yet incorporated into the national curriculum, so it is up to schools to decide whether they should teach it. According to the deaf children interviewed in the article, teaching aspects of BSL to hearing students is viewed as an opportunity to remove obstacles when trying to make friends and communicate with the world. Additionally, the article raises the important issue of the mental toll of communication barriers between deaf and hearing people; it is this barrier that can lead to deaf people feeling isolated in the world. It seems particularly beneficial, therefore, that hearing people are introduced to at least basic sign language from a young age. This is so deaf people are not emerging into the (predominantly hearing) world with communication setbacks that could lead to them feeling solitary throughout their lives. Further, learning BSL provides hearing people with the opportunity to interact with deaf people who naturally have different life experiences and to be able to communicate with more people in professional and everyday settings.

**As a GCSE**

Teaching BSL as a GCSE would make BSL as a language more respected and recognised, as it would be given the same weighting as other languages that are taught at GCSE (that are thus deemed valuable in some way by the UK government). This would pave the way for further inclusion and recognition of deaf people and their intrinsic contributions to society. For people who use BSL as their first language, this would ensure they feel personally appreciated by the government, and are given the same opportunities as hearing people. It would also symbolise how the government recognises the rich and valuable culture of deaf communities. For example, Kateryna Pavyluk, in an article highlighting how BSL is in no way inferior to other languages, found that BSL even has its own regional dialects, and also has a fascinating linguistic history. [[12]](#footnote-12) Nearly two decades since BSL was recognised as an official language, deaf people want BSL to be truly considered as important as the languages that are GCSE qualifications . Secondly, in this country, there is a shortage of qualified teachers of the deaf, as well as BSL interpreters (to whom I referred previously). [[13]](#footnote-13) Most of the people who would take these jobs have to be hearing in order to communicate effectively with both the hearing and hard of hearing world. Therefore, if BSL GCSE was to be added to the National Curriculum, and promoted by educational boards, hearing people who take BSL GCSE would be able to become either BSL interpreters or teachers in deaf schools in the future. Additionally, more specialised teachers of the deaf would improve educational attainment for deaf children who, “In 2016, 41.3% achieved the expected benchmark of 5 GCSEs at A star to C grade, compared to 69.3% of children with no identified special needs.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Hence, offering a BSL GCSE benefits both deaf and hearing people economically and socially.

**Arguments against teaching BSL at GCSE level**

While the MPs (debating whether BSL should become part of the national curriculum in 2018[[15]](#footnote-15)) unanimously agreed that BSL should be offered as a GCSE subject, the Minister of State for School Standards, Nick Gibb, stated that making a BSL GCSE “ is not a simple process”. Since the National Curriculum was reformed in 2014, Nick Gibb believes the Department for Education are dubious about introducing any new GCSE’s because they wish to allow for a period of stability. Secondly, Gibb was sceptical whether a BSL GCSE would contain enough in depth subject content for it to be considered the same weighting as pre-existing GCSE subjects. I would counter-act this statement by referencing Stokoe in, ‘The study and use of sign language’, who argues that the abundance of grammatical and nuanced syntax present in sign language makes it an extremely valuable language to learn[[16]](#footnote-16). Nick Gibb additionally raised the point that academies, who are, “not obliged to follow any part of the [national curriculum](https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum) [[17]](#footnote-17), and make up, “two thirds of secondary schools”, would not have to teach BSL, even it was compulsory or advised to do so. This means that, no matter how much weighting the government put on teaching BSL, the majority of the country’s schools could choose not to teach it.

 Finally, Gibb argues that Level 1 and 2 BSL Qualifications, offered by the, “Institute of British Sign Language, Signature and ABC awards” can already be taught in schools should they wish to teach them as extracurriculars. He claimed that there is simply no need for a BSL GCSE. I would rebut this statement by stating that succeeding in some of the Level 1 and 2 qualifications mentioned by Nick Gibb appears to be rather costly . For example, homework and other learning resources offered by the Signature Level 2 (GCSE level) BSL course costs upwards of £40.00. [[18]](#footnote-18) It seems even more essential that BSL is added to the national curriculum because the free standing qualification would simply be unaffordable for some people in the UK. This government prides itself on its state education system, and yet a qualification in a language used as a first language by 87,00 people is not provided to the population for free. In essence, adding a BSL GCSE is not viewed as such an urgent matter by the Department for Education, and some argue it is not something worth spending government money on.

**Is there demand for learning BSL in secondary schools?**



I conducted primary research at my own secondary school through google forms, and concluded that there is certainly interest amongst 11-18 year olds in learning BSL. Out of 241 responses from years 7-13, over 50% of these students ranked their interest in learning BSL as 4 or 5 out of 5 (with 5 being the most interested). Further, 69 percent of pupils ranked their knowledge of BSL at the lowest level (1), meaning the majority of students at my secondary school possess minimal sign language skills. However, when asked whether they would like BSL to be introduced as a **compulsory** part of the curriculum, only 38% of the 241 students answered “yes, definitely “, with 16% stating “no” and nearly half (46%) of pupils stating “maybe”. Based on these statistics, I think BSL as a subject in secondary schools would be more popular and successful if it were to be made optional. Drawing from my own experience at secondary school, certainly by GCSE years, pupils value the independence that being free to choose GCSE subjects affords them. In general , pupils become less interested in the subjects that are compulsory at GCSE, decreasing the likelihood of them studying these subject further. I believe BSL would be no different. Therefore, I deduce that there definitely is demand to learn BSL, but that secondary school pupils would like to be able to choose whether they take BSL classes (i.e it should be optional).



**Conclusion**

Overall, I feel compelled to conclude that widely teaching BSL in UK schools in some manner would be beneficial for a range of people; not only those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. In primary schools, as has been evident from my secondary research, teaching sign language to all pupils promotes awareness for the deaf community while also providing children with an alternative way to learn English words. There is wide demand for including BSL in our curriculum, as shown by primary research conducted within my own secondary school and also due to the fact that this issue has been debated in parliament. BSL should be at least offered as a GCSE in state secondary schools by the government, at is seems to be a direct way to alleviate the shortage of BSL interpreters and teachers of the deaf. Certainly, BSL at GCSE level should be optional, as this would ensure that only people interested in BSL as a language pursue it further. While some argue that it is too costly, and does not possess enough linguistic complexity, if it means 87,00 people feel more included in society, I argue a BSL GCSE is extremely valuable. In a world designed for a majority of able-bodied people, we need to do as much as we can for minorities and those with disabilities, so all feel welcome and valued in society.

**Imogen Whelan EPQ Project Review**

Overall, I managed to meet all of the finalised objectives stated in my Project Proposal Form , which were: to discuss how BSL can be taught more in schools, to explore how BSL can be implemented at different educational stages and to explore the benefits of more BSL learning in the UK.

Fortunately, I devised these objectives to be quite broad, so I was able to answer all of my objectives in some way or another throughout my essay. However, if I had more time, I would have liked to research more of the alternative BSL learning (GCSE equivalent) courses, as I only had time to look into the Signature Level 2 BSL course. I had hoped to interview a user of BSL, but was unable to do so as no one was available to be interviewed within my school’s organisation. I overcame this hurdle by coming up with an alternative way to obtain primary research; through Google Forms.

Most valuably, I have learnt how to interpret and analyse sources in a way that I had never attempted before. I learned how to assess the reliability, limitations and relevance of a source, and how to reference correctly, which will be useful for my A-Level studies and beyond. Undertaking this project with a partner (Fia), taught me how to collaborate with a peer through talking in an academic manner about a subject we are both passionate about. Although we each went on our own individual trajectories, it was useful to have someone to talk to about time-management and deadline setting. This project has enabled me to be sure that I want to take at least one language for A-Levels, as I have discovered I have an interest in language education through both writing my own essay and reading Fia’s.

This project has fuelled my interest in learning British Sign Language. I hope to either teach myself on platforms such a YouTube, or re-start a BSL club at my school (once I have gained adequate BSL knowledge). While I had knowledge of a few basic signs before my research, I actually absorbed a lot of BSL through watching BSL interpreters in the 2018 BSL debate in Parliament[[19]](#footnote-19).

If I did another EPQ in the future, I would try to summarise some of my sources in my research record log more succinctly, as most of the summarising of longer sources was not entirely relevant to the content of my final essay. However, it did mean that writing the essay was slightly easier because I was able to recall the content of the sources more quickly. I would also factor in more time to do research, as I had to amend this deadline to a later date due to school commitments (as stated in my activity log). Finally, if I had more time to complete this EPQ, I would have perhaps interviewed some people from my local primary school, to interpret their views on BSL learning in younger children, as I gather that is the most valuable time to learn any language. Unfortunately, I simply did not have the time to carry out another form of primary research.

Overall, I think I have performed well, and I am proud of my written essay outcome, especially the detail with which I analysed each source. I also covered all of the objectives that I set out to achieve and came to a clear conclusion. I think I slightly underestimated how long it would take for me to do both primary and secondary research, which meant I had to amend a few writing deadlines, but I managed to complete my project on time by being organised when writing the main body of my essay.

1. Nuria Castro, 22/03/2022, MFL EPQ Email questions to MFL staff at Putney High School [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. William C.Stokoe, “The Study and Use of Sign Language”, Gallaudet University Press, 1976 p382 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://bda.org.uk/help-resources/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beth Rose, BBC Ouch, ‘Coronavirus: Lack of sign language interpreters leads to legal case against government, 28/04/2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Beth Rose (BBC Ouch), “Coronavirus: Lack of sign language interpreters lead to legal case against government”, 28/04/2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate” [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)06/03/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate” [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)06/03/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Barbara Cooper, “The Reading Teacher, Vol.56, No.2”, “The Use of Sign Language to teach reading to kindergarteners ”, 10/2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cooper, 2002: p119 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Katheryn Sellgren, BBC, “Should pupils have to learn sign language?” 15/03/2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Emily Drabble (The Guardian) , “How to teach…sign language”, 15/07/2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kateryna Pavlyuk, “British Sign Language – an inferior form of communication to spoken language?” Babel The Language Magazine, August 2013, p2 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate” [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)06/03/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate” [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)06/03/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “British Sign Language: National Curriculum Petition debate” [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk)06/03/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Stokoe, 1976: p375 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Nick Gibb, March 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQKW8DR2ggk> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.signature.org.uk/british-sign-language-level-2-certificate/> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. [**https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk**](https://youtu.be/RQKW8DR2ggk) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)