

Beyond the news bulletin: Kenya sign language and deaf audience inclusion across Kenyan television genres

Shichana Mbishi¹
Nyakundi Nyamboga²
Matu Nguri³

¹shichana@yahoo.co.uk

^{1,2,3} Moi University, Kenya

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.4.78>

ABSTRACT

Kenya Sign Language (KSL) is established in Kenyan television news, but its use across other genres remains uneven. This study examined how mainstream television producers engage Deaf audiences beyond routine news bulletins by determining where KSL is integrated, the technical formats used and the institutional factors that trigger inclusion. Guided by Critical Disability Theory, the study used an interpretivist qualitative multiple-case design. Twenty-one participants were selected purposively and through snowball referrals: nine television or film producers, two communications-regulator officials, two KSL interpreters, two psychologists and six Deaf television users. Data from semi-structured interviews, policy documents and focused broadcast observations were analyzed thematically. KSL integration was selective and event-driven, occurring mainly during elections, national ceremonies, public-health briefings and other civic broadcasts. The interpreter inset remained the dominant format, with limited genre-specific adaptation, while regulation, editorial decisions, client budgets and advocacy pressure largely determined inclusion. The study concludes that Kenyan television provides conditional accessibility: Deaf audiences are treated more consistently as recipients of public information than as routine participants in entertainment and television culture. Broadcasters should incorporate accessibility into commissioning and pre-production, develop genre-sensitive KSL formats, conduct Deaf-user testing and improve audience measurement.

Keywords: Deaf Audiences; Inclusive Broadcasting; Kenya Sign Language; Media Accessibility; Television Genres; Television Production

I. INTRODUCTION

Television accessibility is a communication-rights issue as much as a technical one. For Deaf audiences, access depends not only on whether a broadcaster offers an interpreter, but on whether sign language is visible, linguistically appropriate and incorporated into the genres through which citizens participate in civic and cultural life. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established a rights-based expectation of accessible information and media (United Nations, 2006), while Kenya's Constitution recognizes Kenya Sign Language and guarantees reasonable access to information for persons with disabilities (Kenya, 2010). The World Health Organization's current account of hearing loss similarly underscores the scale of communication exclusion when services are not designed for diverse hearing profiles (World Health Organization, 2026).

The communication problem is particularly sharp in television because broadcasting combines language, visual attention, time pressure, commercial graphics and genre conventions. Media-accessibility scholarship has moved beyond the assumption that a small interpreter inset automatically produces inclusion. Dhoest and Rijckaert (2022) distinguish between news that merely has sign language and communication genuinely designed in sign language, while Yi et al. (2021) show that layout; size and placement affect the usefulness of signed television services. Espineda (2024) similarly demonstrates that interpreter insets can support social inclusion but only when the visual design makes the interpreter legible. More recent work by Espineda and Gimeno (2025) and Loaiza-Ramírez and González-Beltrán (2026) broaden these arguments toward multimodal and digital accessibility guidelines.

Access also concerns cultural participation. Entertainment, drama and lifestyle television carry identity, humour, aspiration and shared reference points; exclusion from these genres is therefore different from exclusion from a single news bulletin. Research on Deaf representation in screen culture shows that agency is affected by who controls translation, storytelling and visual framing (Chang & Golos, 2025; Gollan, 2026; King & Gollan, 2026). Lash (2026) likewise emphasizes that film and television representations help shape public understandings of deafness and Deaf identity. From a critical disability perspective, the question is not simply whether media institutions accommodate a minority audience, but whose communication practices are treated as normal enough to be designed into mainstream production (Pothier & Devlin, 2006; Rugoho, 2024).

The African evidence base remains comparatively thin, even as digitally mediated sign-language communication is expanding. Musengi et al. (2024) demonstrate how Deaf communities in Zimbabwe use mobile media to sustain linguistic and social participation, while Carne et al. (2024) show that media framing can still reproduce ideological assumptions about sign languages and their users in southern Africa. Internationally, Labio-Bernal and García-Prieto (2022) found uneven sign-language provision even within public-service systems; Mathews et al. (2023) demonstrate how crisis interpreting can temporarily make access highly visible; and Espineda and Valdez (2026) show that barriers persist when accessible reporting is not embedded systematically. These patterns make Kenya an important case for examining what happens after news-based compliance has become routine but before accessibility has become genre-wide practice.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's constitutional recognition of Kenya Sign Language establishes a basis for accessible communication, but legal recognition alone does not explain whether Deaf audiences can participate in the full range of television programming (Kenya, 2010; United Nations, 2006). An interpreter in a news bulletin may provide access to public information while leaving drama, music, reality, religious and lifestyle content outside routine accessibility provision. International evidence identifies uneven sign-language provision and weaknesses in visual presentation, yet these findings do not establish how Kenyan producers decide which genres merit interpretation or how existing production routines shape those decisions (Labio-Bernal & García-Prieto, 2022; Dhoest & Rijckaert, 2022; Yi et al., 2021).

The problem is therefore the insufficient understanding of the relationship between formal communication rights and the production decisions that determine KSL access beyond routine news. Without evidence on genre selection, technical formats and institutional drivers, broadcasters and regulators have a limited basis for moving from occasional accommodation to planned inclusion across the television schedule. This study addresses that gap by examining producers' decisions alongside regulatory, interpreting and Deaf-audience perspectives in commercial, public and government-linked production environments. It asks where KSL is integrated beyond news, how it is presented, and which institutional conditions enable or constrain its inclusion.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the television genres and events in which KSL is integrated beyond routine news;
- ii. To examine the technical formats used to integrate KSL across television genres; and
- iii. To analyze the institutional, regulatory and audience-related factors that influence producers' decisions to include KSL.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Critical Disability Theory

Critical Disability Theory (CDT) treats disability exclusion as the product of social, institutional, political and cultural arrangements rather than as a deficit located in the individual (Pothier & Devlin, 2006). This perspective is compatible with disability-media research that examines framing and representation (Goethals et al., 2022; Carne et al., 2024). It also accommodates the communication agency emphasized by De Ridder (2024) and the politics of visual storytelling explored by Gollan (2026). From this perspective, television accessibility is an institutional practice shaped by whose communication needs receive priority, when access is considered necessary, and how resources are allocated. For Deaf audiences, the availability and form of KSL provision may depend on editorial priorities, regulatory expectations, production resources, advocacy and the perceived significance of particular broadcasts. The study uses CDT to examine when broadcasters recognize Deaf audiences, which production routines receive priority, and how technical choices distribute opportunities for participation across genres. Conditional accessibility describes provision whose availability and form depend on institutional, event-specific and production conditions rather than being routinely embedded across television genres.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 KSL Integration Across Television Genres

Labio-Bernal and García-Prieto (2022) identify uneven sign-language provision in the BBC and TVE, indicating that public-service status does not itself guarantee inclusive programming. This agrees with the current study's finding that KSL access remains selective across the examined Kenyan production environments. The present study extends that comparison by examining the decisions behind provision, including civic relevance and client commissioning. Mathews et al. (2023) examine interpreting during the COVID-19 crisis in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Their emphasis on communication during emergencies is consistent with the prominence of public-health briefings in the Kenyan accounts, but the current study also identifies elections, national ceremonies and commissioned productions as

triggers. This is a difference in scope, rather than evidence that crisis interpreting functions differently in Kenya. Espineda and Valdez (2026) similarly identify barriers in accessible Philippine news reporting; their news-focused analysis complements, but does not answer, the present question of how accessibility extends into other genres. Musengi et al. (2024) emphasize opportunities for Deaf linguistic participation through mobile media in Zimbabwe. In comparison, the Kenyan findings concern institutionally controlled television production, where audience participation depends on editorial and funding decisions. Carne et al. (2024) examine ideological framing in the South African press, highlighting representation rather than broadcast provision. Together, these studies locate the current inquiry within African debates on participation while showing why evidence on Kenyan television production decisions is still needed.

2.2.2 Technical Formats and Visual Accessibility

Yi et al. (2021) place interpreter size and screen arrangement at the centre of sign-language service design, while Espineda (2024) examines inset presentation during a Philippine presidential address. Both agree with the current study's Deaf-participant accounts that the presence of an interpreter is insufficient when the signing space is too small. Espineda and Gimeno (2025) further connect comprehension to simpler graphical layouts, supporting the relevance of the present finding that sponsor graphics and established production templates influence interpreter visibility. The current study differs in analytical emphasis: it explains why producers retain those templates, rather than testing an optimal screen configuration. Boudreault et al. (2024) report favourable usability of customizable closed interpreting, with preferences varying by content. The broadcaster-controlled inset identified in the Kenyan cases differs from that user-controlled approach. This contrast suggests an option for future testing, but the present interviews do not demonstrate that customization would produce the same results for KSL audiences. W3C and ITU guidance provide standards against which such formats can be assessed; they are normative guidance rather than empirical confirmation of the Kenyan findings (World Wide Web Consortium, 2024; International Telecommunication Union, 2025).

2.2.3 Institutional Drivers of Accessibility

Haualand et al. (2022) and De Meulder and Haualand (2021) treat interpreting as a social institution shaped by rules, resources and assumptions about inclusion. This agrees with the current finding that regulatory expectations, commissioning budgets and advocacy influence KSL provision. The Kenyan study adds a production-specific explanation: access is negotiated through editorial approval, client briefs, sponsor visibility and audience measurement. De Meulder and Stone (2024) examine the effort Deaf users undertake within interpreter-mediated communication, whereas Romero-Fresco (2021) addresses negotiated quality assessment in live subtitling. Their work supports examining the experience and quality of access, although neither directly establishes how Kenyan television producers select genres for KSL. Loaiza-Ramírez and González-Beltrán (2026) emphasize diverse digital-accessibility needs, and Samčović (2022) and Lee and Lee (2025) examine accessible services within digital television and new media. Compared with these broader service possibilities, the current cases reveal continued reliance on the inset. This difference concerns implementation and institutional priorities; the current design does not measure the relative effectiveness of alternative services. These comparisons distinguish the availability of accessibility technologies from the organizational decisions needed to incorporate them routinely.

2.3 Research Gap

Existing studies explain sign-language presentation, usability and public-service access, but provide limited evidence on how Kenyan producers decide when KSL should extend beyond news, which production formats they use and how institutional pressures shape those decisions. This study addresses that contextual and production-governance gap by comparing commercial, public and government-linked television environments in Kenya.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted an interpretivist-constructivist orientation and a qualitative multiple-case study design. The cases represented commercial, public and government-linked television production environments. This design was appropriate because the study examined institutional routines, producer judgments, regulatory practices and Deaf viewers' experiences within their organizational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted within Kenya's mainstream television sector. It covered commercial broadcasters, the public broadcaster, government-linked film production and the national communications regulator. The selected settings enabled comparison of KSL accessibility practices across different mandates, funding arrangements and production environments.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised television and film producers, officials of the Communications Authority of Kenya, KSL interpreters, psychologists experienced in work with Deaf communities, and Deaf television users. These groups were selected because they influence, deliver, evaluate or directly experience KSL accessibility in television.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants with direct knowledge of television production, regulation, interpreting or Deaf audience experience. Snowball referrals supplemented recruitment where specialist networks were difficult to access. The final sample comprised 21 participants: nine television or film producers, two Communications Authority of Kenya officials, two KSL interpreters, two psychologists with experience of Deaf communities and six Deaf television users.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, document and policy analysis, and focused observation of selected broadcasts. An interview guide ensured coverage of the study objectives while allowing participants to explain institutional and experiential issues in depth. Deaf participants were interviewed with professional KSL interpreter support, and translation-verification procedures were used. Policy documents and broadcast observations provided evidence for triangulation.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Transcripts, field notes, broadcast observations and policy materials were reviewed repeatedly; descriptive and interpretive codes were generated manually and with NVivo; related codes were clustered, reviewed and named as themes; and interpretations were compared across participant groups and cases. The process followed Braun and Clarke (2021). Triangulation, reflexive notes, thick description, peer debriefing and an audit trail strengthened trustworthiness.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Moi University's Institutional Research Ethics Committee and the relevant national authorities before fieldwork. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and privacy and confidentiality were protected. Deaf participants received accessible KSL video versions of consent information.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 KSL Integration Across Genres: Selective and Event-Driven

This section presents findings on KSL integration beyond routine news bulletins across the examined commercial broadcasters (Citizen TV and KTN), public broadcaster (KBC), and government-linked film production environments. Participants described provision as selective and event-driven, with interpretation concentrated in broadcasts considered nationally significant, civic-oriented or institutionally important. The pattern was reported across the different production environments.

The most consistent use of KSL, according to the participants, beyond news programs occurs during major national and civic events. Producers routinely incorporate sign language interpretation during presidential addresses, election coverage, political debates, Ministry of Health briefings such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, national celebrations including Madaraka Day and Mashujaa Day, and other state ceremonies. In these contexts, accessibility is justified as a matter of public information rights and constitutional obligation. Producers frame these moments as nationally unifying events that require inclusive communication. As a result, interpretation is expected to be part of the broadcast. Beyond major national events, integration typically appears only in selected talk shows and public affairs programming. Morning shows that focus on governance, public health, or social rights occasionally include interpreters, particularly when the discussions carry clear civic relevance.

Extended political panels and policy discussions are also more likely to feature interpretation than entertainment-focused segments. Religious broadcasts, including national prayer events and some Sunday services, sometimes incorporate sign language, especially when the event is framed as nationally significant. However, integration in these formats remains inconsistent. Producers tend to assess the "weight" of a topic before deciding whether it is necessary to bring in an interpreter. Inclusion of a sign language interpreter becomes more likely when a program features a Deaf guest. This suggests that such participation, rather than the TV station's commitment to this programming structure, often triggers accessibility of TV content for Deaf audiences. Documentary and government-linked productions provide a more stable space for KSL integration beyond news bulletins. Government-produced documentaries, Department of Film Services projects, TVET-related productions, and client-funded informational

content are more likely to embed sign language interpretation. In these cases, accessibility is often built into the production brief or supported through a dedicated budget line. Government mandates and public service obligations appear to encourage more deliberate inclusion within these genres. However, even here, integration is typically linked to institutional directives rather than being a mainstream approach.

In contrast, commercial entertainment genres such as drama series, reality television, music programming, and youth entertainment rarely incorporate sign language under normal production cycles. Producers view these genres as driven by aesthetics, pace, and commercial considerations that do not routinely accommodate interpretation. As a result, accessibility of the contents of such programs to Deaf audiences remains peripheral to entertainment programming. Across all cases, the integration of Kenya Sign Language beyond news programs is episodic rather than standardized. Producers do not embed sign language at the conceptual stage of their programs. Instead, they add it in response to specific events and other considerations such as perceived civic importance, regulatory compliance, or external requests. Integration remains dependent on specific topics rather than being embedded in the genre. This pattern reveals how producers conceptualize accessibility: as situational and event-triggered rather than structurally integrated within mainstream TV programming design. Here is what one participant stated:

“Yes (sign language is integrated in TV), but not often. During elections or major national events, I have seen sign language interpretation extended beyond normal news hours. Sometimes, talk shows discussing elections include interpreters.” — Deaf participant [Df002], interview, [16 July 2022]

“For talk shows, especially public affairs programs, we always include sign language interpreters when the topic is civic-focused, such as elections or public health campaigns. However, for entertainment formats like drama or reality shows, we hardly do.” — TV journalist [TVJ004], interview, [5 July 2022]

4.1.2 Technical Formats: Template-Driven Integration

Mainstream television stations in Kenya often rely on a narrow and largely standardized set of technical models for integrating sign language into broadcasting. Producers across commercial broadcasters (i.e., KTN and Citizen TV), the public broadcaster (KBC), and government film producers all tend to adapt existing news-format accessibility structures to other programs, resulting in technical uniformity across various types of TV content. According to the study participants, the most common format the television stations in Kenya employ is the inset interpreter box, which is often positioned at the bottom corner of the television screen. According to various producers, this picture-in-picture model is the most practical and least disruptive approach. It allows the primary visual frame to remain intact while adding the sign language interpretation as a secondary layer at the bottom corner.

TV stations favor this model because it preserves advertising space, maintains sponsor visibility, and requires minimal alteration to the standard studio layout. It also aligns with established news production templates, making it technically convenient to replicate in morning talk shows, political debates, and national ceremonies. However, while the inset model enables quick deployment, it often results in a relatively small signing space, which may limit visual clarity and expressive range for Deaf viewers. For pre-recorded programs such as documentaries and institutional productions, producers use post-production layering. In this approach, the interpreter is recorded separately, often against a green screen, and composited into the final edit during post-production. This method provides greater technical control. Editors can synchronize the signed interpretation carefully with the audio track and adjust framing before final broadcast. Producers indicated that this model is easier to manage than live integration because it reduces real-time pressure and allows corrections. However, it requires additional editing time and specialized technical input, and can drive up the cost of production. As a result, it is more common in commissioned or government-funded projects than in routine commercial entertainment programming.

A less common but emerging practice involves placing the interpreter physically within the studio environment rather than isolating them in a small inset box. In some talk shows and public affairs programs, interpreters appear in wider camera shots alongside the show hosts and guests. This approach seeks to normalize the presence of a sign language interpreter and presents inclusion as part of the program's structure rather than an external overlay. Producers who experimented with this format described it as a step toward visual integration. However, this model remains limited and experimental. The producers must design the set carefully and plan their production appropriately for it to be successful, which may be part of why this approach has not yet become standard practice across stations.

From the findings, it is evident that technical integration of sign language beyond news remains template-driven. Producers extend the existing news model into the programming of civic content with minimal change to the structure. There is little evidence of genre-specific adaptations of the model to accommodate sign language in drama, music, or reality television. Instead, technical integration prioritizes efficiency, convenience, and alignment with established broadcast routines. This reinforces the broader pattern identified under Theme One: accessibility is added within existing production structures rather than embedded through comprehensive redesign.

“But on the big stations, the “box” is often too small. If the interpreter signs “money” or “work,” and their hand goes outside that tiny square, I miss the word.” — Deaf participant [Df006], interview, [16 July 2022]

“For pre-recorded programs, it’s slightly easier. We can record the interpreter separately and composite the feed in post-production. However, this requires additional editing time and cost.” — TV reporter [TVR001], interview, [14 July 2022]

4.1.3 Institutional Drivers: Regulation, Budgets and Advocacy

Integration of sign language beyond news programming is not only selective and technically standardized, but also strongly shaped by institutional decision-making dynamics. Rather than ensure greater accessibility of television for Deaf audiences as a creative initiative, producers generally consider regulatory and client requirements, as well as what the public thinks or says, when deciding when and where to integrate KSL in their programming. As a result, inclusion beyond news is not often embedded organically within the programming culture of different newsrooms.

Regulatory compliance emerged as a central driver. Producers across commercial stations and the public broadcaster repeatedly referenced the role of the Communications Authority of Kenya in shaping accessibility practices within the newsroom. News programming carries clearer regulatory expectations, and stations have internalized these requirements as standard practice. However, expansion beyond news often reflects attempts to demonstrate these stations’ responsiveness to evolving programming codes rather than a proactive inclusion strategy. Producers reported that periods characterized by heightened regulatory attention, such as during elections or national crises, often encouraged greater integration efforts. In such contexts, stations appear motivated to signal compliance with applicable regulations and social responsibility. Yet this expansion rarely translates into permanent structural change across genres.

Client and donor requirements also influence KSL integration patterns, particularly in documentary and commissioned productions. Producers indicated that when external clients insist on sign language interpretation and provide the dedicated budget required to facilitate it, inclusion becomes straightforward to implement. Government departments and public institutions are more likely to embed accessibility requirements into production briefs. In contrast, commercial entertainment programming without external funding allocates resources for interpretation. This demonstrates how financial backing and contractual obligations can shape accessibility decisions more decisively than internal editorial vision. Audience and advocacy pressure constitute a third layer of influence on decision-making. Producers acknowledged that social media feedback from Deaf viewers and advocacy groups sometimes prompts them to include a sign language interpreter. High-profile interpreters and viral clips have increased public awareness of accessibility gaps. In certain instances, public criticism or direct audience engagement has led stations to incorporate sign language in specific programs or events.

However, producers also noted that conventional audience measurement systems do not disaggregate Deaf viewership data. Without a measurable ratings impact, sustained managerial commitment remains limited, resulting in audience-driven integration being only episodic rather than standard practice.

“The decision can come from multiple directions. Sometimes it’s editorial, if the content is considered nationally significant. Sometimes it’s influenced by regulatory awareness and expectations from the Communications Authority of Kenya.” — TV producer [TVP005], interview, [14 July 2022]

“Sometimes, advocacy groups or viewers reach out, especially via social media, asking why certain programs lack interpretation.” — KTN producer [TV009], interview, [5 July 2022]

4.2 Discussion

Policy developments after the 2022 interviews provide context for the implications of these findings. The Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 4 of 2025 requires KSL insets and closed captioning in specified television categories (Kenya, 2025). The Communications Authority of Kenya’s Programming Code (2024) is a relevant policy document, but its legal status requires qualification: the Authority’s annual report records a November 2024 High Court declaration of unconstitutionality, a six-month stay, and an appeal that remained undecided at 30 June 2025 (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2026). The code is therefore considered as policy context rather than an unqualified statement of current enforceable requirements. The Kenya Sign Language Bill, 2024 is discussed as a legislative proposal (Kenya, 2024). These post-fieldwork developments do not establish changes in participants’ practices. International Telecommunication Union (2025) guidance, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 (World Wide Web Consortium, 2024), and Ofcom’s (2026) access-services reporting offer further reference points for accessibility design and monitoring.

The selective provision identified here is consistent with Labio-Bernal and García-Prieto’s (2022) evidence of uneven sign-language provision in public television. Mathews et al. (2023) examine crisis interpreting, a context that helps explain the prominence of public-health briefings in participants’ accounts without establishing the prevalence of access across genres. Through CDT, the Kenyan pattern suggests that broadcasters recognize Deaf audiences more consistently as recipients of civic information than as routine participants in television culture. The present study extends these accounts by identifying conditional accessibility across commercial, public and government-linked production environments, including commissioned documentaries and occasional talk shows. Differences in national context,

institutional mandate and research focus limit direct comparison. The interviews explain how perceived public importance activates provision; they do not provide a population-wide measure of accessible broadcasting.

The dominance of the inset is consistent with research showing that interpreter size, placement and surrounding graphics affect comprehension (Espineda, 2024; Espineda & Gimeno, 2025; Yi et al., 2021). The Deaf participant's account of signs extending outside a small inset illustrates how technical presence can coexist with incomplete access. This study connects that difficulty to producers' preference for familiar templates and protected advertising space. Boudreault et al. (2024), by contrast, evaluate a customizable closed-interpreting prototype that gives viewers control over presentation. The Kenyan cases predominantly retain broadcaster control over the inset. This is a contrast between production practices and a tested prototype, rather than conflicting estimates of usability. Hermosa-Ramírez (2025) and Loaiza-Ramírez and González-Beltrán (2026) support considering broader accessibility designs, while Lee and Lee (2025) examine promotion of accessible broadcasting through new media. These approaches require local KSL-user testing before their effectiveness can be claimed in the Kenyan settings.

The institutional pattern is consistent with Hauland et al. (2022) and De Meulder and Hauland (2021): interpreting provision is shaped by rules, budgets and organizational decisions as well as interpreter availability. The Kenyan findings specify how client budgets can enable inclusion, while editorial priorities and the absence of disaggregated Deaf audience data can limit sustained commitment. This emphasis on production governance complements screen-representation research. Chang and Golos (2025), Gollan (2026), King and Gollan (2026) and Lash (2026) examine portrayals or creative control, whereas this study examines access to existing programmes. These studies address related but distinct dimensions of participation. Similarly, Musengi et al. (2024) examine participation through mobile media, while Carne et al. (2024) examine press framing. Findings from these media should therefore inform comparison without being treated as direct evidence of Kenyan television practices.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

KSL has moved beyond complete absence in Kenyan television, but it has not yet moved beyond conditional inclusion. The study found that sign language is most visible outside news when an event is nationally significant, when a client or regulator requires it, or when public pressure makes accessibility salient. The dominant technical response remains a news-derived inset that is efficient for producers but not always optimal for users. The communication challenge is therefore institutional: broadcasters need to redefine Deaf audiences as routine members of the television public. Genre-sensitive design, accessible commissioning, user testing, audience measurement and digital choice can widen participation without treating every program identically. The broader contribution is to show that accessibility is produced through editorial and production decisions; changing those decisions is central to moving KSL from the margin of the frame into the ordinary logic of Kenyan television.

5.2 Recommendations

Broadcasters should include KSL accessibility requirements and a dedicated budget at commissioning and pre-production stages. They should develop genre-specific formats rather than applying the news inset unchanged to drama, music, reality and lifestyle programs. Minimum requirements for interpreter size, safe screen zones, contrast and interaction with graphics should be tested with Deaf viewers. Broadcasters and audience-research organizations should also develop mechanisms for identifying Deaf viewership and evaluating user experience, while digital services should test optional KSL streams and accessible clips.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Boudreault, P., Abubakar, M., Duran, A., Lam, B., Liu, Z., Vogler, C., & Kushalnagar, R. (2024). Closed sign language interpreting: A usability study. In K. Miesenberger, P. Peñáz, & M. Kobayashi (Eds.), *Computers helping people with special needs: ICCHP 2024* (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 14751, pp. 42–49). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-62849-8_6

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications. <https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/thematic-analysis-1-248481>
- Carne, C., Oostendorp, M., & Baker, A. (2024). Ideological framing of sign languages and their users in the South African press. *Multilingua*, 43(4), 525–552. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2023-0040>
- Chang, A., & Golos, D. (2025). Portrayal of deaf characters in Korean movies. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 30(3), 372–383. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdsade/enaf003>
- Communications Authority of Kenya. (2024). *The programming code for broadcasting services in Kenya* (4th ed.). <https://www.ca.go.ke/sites/default/files/CA/Programming%20Code/Programming%20Code%204th%20Edition%20March%202024.pdf>
- Communications Authority of Kenya. (2026). *Annual report for the financial year 2024–2025*. <https://www.ca.go.ke/sites/default/files/2026-07/Annual%20Report%20FY%202024-2025.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design-4-246896>
- De Meulder, M., & Haualand, H. (2021). Sign language interpreting services: A quick fix for inclusion? *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 16(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.18008.dem>
- De Meulder, M., & Stone, C. (2024). Finally free from the interpreter's gaze? Uncovering the hidden labor of gaze work for Deaf consumers of interpreter services. *International Journal of Interpreter Education*, 15(1), 87–98. <https://open.clemson.edu/ijie/vol15/iss1/8/>
- De Ridder, R. (2024). AVT and agency: Revoicing to give a voice to minoritized language communities. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 7(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v7i2.2024.315>
- Dhoest, A., & Rijckaert, J. (2022). News 'with' or 'in' sign language? Case study on the comprehensibility of sign language in news broadcasts. *Perspectives*, 30(4), 627–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2021.1936088>
- Espineda, M. N. (2024). Social inclusion and the use of sign language inset during the 2019 Philippine SONA. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 23, 831–841. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-023-00968-1>
- Espineda, M. N., & Gimeno, S. F. A. (2025). A phenomenological analysis of the #KuyaKimAnoNa segment of the 24 Oras newscast's graphical elements for deaf viewers. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 24, 1461–1469. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-024-01150-x>
- Espineda, M. N., & Valdez, K. J. T. (2026). Climate change inequality and barriers to accessible news reporting for deaf viewers on 24 Oras in the Philippines. *Discover Sustainability*, 7, Article 1014. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-026-03694-9>
- Goethals, T., Mortelmans, D., Van den Bulck, H., Van den Heurck, W., & Van Hove, G. (2022). I am not your metaphor: Frames and counter-frames in the representation of disability. *Disability & Society*, 37(5), 746–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1836478>
- Gollan, S. (2026). A call for change: Sign language cinema and the politics of visual storytelling. *Transnational Screens*, 17(1), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2025.2590792>
- Haualand, H., De Meulder, M., & Napier, J. (2022). Unpacking sign language interpreting as a social institution: The missing macro perspective? *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 17(3), 351–358. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.00055.hau>
- Hermosa-Ramírez, I. (2025). Universal and ecological design in media accessibility: Finding common ground. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 24, 1977–1984. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-023-01077-9>
- International Telecommunication Union. (2025). *Accessibility to broadcasting services for persons with disabilities* (Report ITU-R BT.2207-7). <https://www.itu.int/pub/R-REP-BT.2207-7-2025>
- Kenya. (2010). *Constitution of Kenya*. Kenya Law. <https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Constitution/Constitution of Kenya2010.pdf>
- Kenya. (2024). *The Kenya Sign Language Bill, 2024*. Kenya Law. https://www.kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2024/TheKenyaSignLanguageBill_2024.pdf
- Kenya. (2025). *Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 4 of 2025*. Kenya Law. <https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/2025/4/eng@2025-05-13>
- King, G., & Gollan, S. (2026). Lost without translation: *Children of a Lesser God* and sign language filmmaking under non-signing control. *Transnational Screens*, 17(1), 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2025.2573956>
- Labio-Bernal, A., & García-Prieto, V. (2022). Cultural pluralism and diversity on public television: An analysis of the use of sign language on the BBC and TVE. *Critical Studies in Television*, 17(2), 135–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17496020211072460>
- Lash, B. N. (2026). Deafness & hearing loss in film and television: Examining media representations of the deaf/Deaf and hard of hearing. *Popular Communication*, 24(3), 307–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2026.2635491>

- Lee, Y. H., & Lee, J. J. (2025). A study on the promotion of broadcasting for persons with disabilities using new media focusing on the visually or hearing impaired. *Media Asia*, 52(2), 255–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2024.2352949>
- Loaiza-Ramírez, I., & González-Beltrán, B. A. (2026). Digital accessibility guidelines for deaf and hard of hearing persons: A state-of-the-art review article. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 25, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-025-01270-y>
- Mathews, E., Cadwell, P., O’Boyle, S., & Dunne, S. (2023). Crisis interpreting and Deaf community access in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Perspectives*, 31(3), 431–449. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2022.2028873>
- Musengi, M., Muwaniki, C., & Musengi, E. (2024). Mobile media and the sign language of Zimbabwe’s Deaf community. In T. Rugoho (Ed.), *Disability and media: An African perspective* (pp. 9–30). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40885-4_2
- Ofcom. (2026). *Television and on-demand programme services: Access services report—January to December 2025*. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/accessibility/television-and-on-demand-programme-services-access-services-report-january-to-december-2025>
- Pothier, D., & Devlin, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Critical disability theory: Essays in philosophy, politics, policy, and law*. UBC Press. <https://www.ubcpress.ca/critical-disability-theory>
- Romero-Fresco, P. (2021). Negotiating quality assessment in media accessibility: The case of live subtitling. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 20, 741–751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-020-00735-6>
- Rugoho, T. (Ed.). (2024). *Disability and media: An African perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40885-4>
- Samčović, A. (2022). Accessibility of services in digital television for hearing impaired consumers. *Assistive Technology*, 34(2), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2020.1757786>
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>
- World Health Organization. (2026, March 3). *Deafness and hearing loss*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss>
- World Wide Web Consortium. (2024). *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2: W3C Recommendation (12 December 2024)*. <https://www.w3.org/TR/2024/REC-WCAG22-20241212/>
- Yi, J. H., Kim, S., Noh, Y.-G., Ok, S., & Hong, J.-H. (2021). Design proposal for sign language services in TV broadcasting from the perspective of people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. *Applied Sciences*, 11(23), Article 11211. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app112311211>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/case-study-research-and-applications-6-250150>