

Inclusivity in Education: Understanding the Needs of Deaf Students in School Communities

SHYLA M. MANALO

Instructor, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Gordon College

Abstract: Inclusive education seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. This study explored the experiences, challenges, and educational needs of deaf students within inclusive school communities. Specifically, it examined communication accessibility, learning environment, social inclusion, educational and support needs, and recommendations for improving inclusive education. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of deaf students. Purposive sampling was used to select 15 participants who were currently enrolled in educational institutions. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered via Google Forms and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five major themes: (1) Communication Accessibility, (2) Learning Environment, (3) Social Inclusion, (4) Educational and Support Needs, and (5) Recommendations for Inclusive Education. Participants reported that communication barriers, limited access to sign language interpreters, and insufficient sign language proficiency among teachers and classmates negatively affected their academic participation and social interactions. However, visual instructional materials, supportive teachers, assistive technologies, and inclusive classroom practices contributed positively to their learning experiences. The study concludes that achieving genuine inclusive education requires accessible communication, appropriate educational accommodations, teacher preparedness, supportive school communities, and institutional commitment. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, school administrators, policymakers, and future researchers in strengthening inclusive educational practices that promote equity, participation, and academic success among deaf students.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Deaf Students, Communication Accessibility, Educational Accommodations, Social Inclusion, Filipino Sign Language (FSL), Inclusive Learning Environment.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic human right that gives people the chance to advance economically, socially, and personally. It provides a basis for creating inclusive communities in which every student has an equal chance to learn and achieve, regardless of their skills or limitations. However, many students with disabilities still encounter obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in school settings, despite efforts globally to improve educational inclusion. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are among these learners they typically experience difficulties with social integration, communication, and to educational access resources.

One of the biggest obstacles to inclusive education in the globe is still hearing impairment. Over 34 million children worldwide suffer from permanent hearing loss, according to the World Health Organization (2021). This high figure emphasizes how urgently educational systems must create welcoming and accessible learning environments that meet the special needs of deaf students. These students may struggle with academic success, social interaction, and general educational development in the absence of suitable treatments and inclusive practices. Schools must therefore implement policies that provide deaf children equal access to high-quality instruction and chances for meaningful involvement in class activities.

The idea that all students, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, should get an education alongside their peers in a

classroom that values diversity and accommodates each student's unique learning requirements is promoted by inclusive education. In addition to granting access to education, inclusive education seeks to establish a sense of community where each student is encouraged and feels appreciated. By implementing laws and initiatives that promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms, numerous nations have strengthened their commitment to inclusive education in recent years. These initiatives are a reflection of the rising understanding that diversity enhances education and helps create more equal educational systems.

Despite these developments, there are still major obstacles in the way of inclusive education's full implementation. While inclusive practices are becoming more common in Indonesian elementary schools, several challenges still exist, according to Noor and Sriyanto (2025). These issues include inadequate infrastructure and facilities for education, a lack of social support in school communities, and a lack of teacher competency in meeting the requirements of deaf students. Such barriers could limit deaf students' ability to participate completely in class activities and have a negative effect on their social and academic experiences. In order to establish truly inclusive learning environments, the results highlight the significance of strengthening institutional support, expanding school resources, and improving teacher preparation.

The difficulties in implementing inclusive education are not specific to any one nation or area. Similar issues have been noted in Pacific Island Countries (PICs), where the implementation of disability-inclusive communication and knowledge management systems is further complicated by the region's remote location, scarce resources, and varied cultural settings. These elements make it challenging for educational institutions to consistently and successfully support students with disabilities, especially those who have hearing problems, according to Haque (2025). The circumstance highlights the necessity of context-specific strategies that promote equitable opportunity for all students while addressing communicative and educational challenges.

Understanding the needs and experiences of deaf student in school communities is crucial given these realities. Analyzing their viewpoints might reveal important information about the effectiveness of current inclusive strategies and point out areas that require additional development. Teachers and legislators can create measures that promote increased participation, accessibility, and inclusion by comprehending the academic, communication, and social needs of deaf learners. Thus, the purpose of this study, "Inclusivity in Education: Understanding the Needs of Deaf Students in School Communities," is to investigate how educational institutions assist deaf students and to pinpoint the elements that either promote or prevent their inclusion.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be helpful in the development of more adaptable educational methods and policies that support equitable learning opportunities and improve deaf students' overall educational experiences.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore and understand the lived experiences of deaf student with regard to inclusivity within their school communities, this study will use a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach. This study is a good fit for phenomenology since it looks at how people interpret and interpret their experiences. By using this method, the researcher will learn more about the difficulties, requirements, and viewpoints of deaf children with regard to social inclusion in schools, learning settings, and communication accessibility. According To Noor and Sriyanto (2026) It was necessary to actively co-create inclusive communication on the ground because neither teachers nor peers comprehended formal sign language. Peers and students relied on shared situational changes, visual clues, and impromptu, non-standard gestures.

In a community college context where hearing students majority, Puzio (2022) carried out a qualitative phenomenological study investigating the experiences of inclusion and isolation among Deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The study found four main recurrent themes school environment, cultural awareness, institutional support procedures, and native language use. Due to poor acoustics,

lecturers' quick speech, and hearing classmates' overall lack of awareness of Deaf culture, students frequently experienced significant percentages of isolation.

Research Participants

Students who are currently enrolled in educational institutions who are deaf or hard of hearing will participate in the study. Participants who can offer rich and pertinent information about their experiences in inclusive educational environments will be chosen using a purposive sample technique. 10 to 15 people will participate in the study, or until data saturation is reached, at which point no new themes or important information can be found in the data.

Research Instrument

A qualitative questionnaire created by the researcher and distributed using Google Forms will serve as the main tool for gathering data. Participants' experiences, opinions, and thoughts about social inclusion, learning support, communication accessibility, and the difficulties they face in their school communities will be gathered through open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Participants will be able to openly share their ideas, opinions, and experiences regarding inclusion in education and give thorough answers thanks to the use of open-ended questions.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher asked the teachers in charge of the deaf students who were identified as possible participants for permission before beginning the study. The teachers gave their consent for the survey questionnaire to be distributed after being informed of the goals and purpose of the study.

After receiving approval, the researcher gave the participants an informed consent form outlining the study's nature and objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their answers. Participants received guarantees that their names would remain anonymous and that the information they submitted would only be utilized for academic reasons.

A qualitative questionnaire created by the researcher and distributed via Google Forms was used to gather data. Participants were able to freely share their experiences, opinions, and thoughts about communication accessibility, learning support, social inclusion, and the difficulties they face in their school communities thanks to the questionnaire's open-ended questions. The participants had enough time to finish the questionnaire whenever it was most convenient for them. The researcher arranged and prepared the data for analysis after receiving all of the responses.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines throughout the research process to guarantee each participant's safety and well-being. Participants were made aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could leave at any moment without facing any penalties or unfavorable outcomes. Informed consent was acquired prior to data collection following a thorough explanation of the study's objectives, methods, potential advantages, and risks. Participants' identities were protected by codes or pseudonyms, and all collected data was handled with the highest confidentiality. The collected data was used only for academic and research purposes and was safely stored to prevent unwanted access.

Additional ethical practices were adhered to because the study included people with disabilities (PWDs). These included making information easily accessible and comprehensible, making sure that appropriate communication support and reasonable accommodations were available when needed, encouraging voluntary and informed participation without coercion, and maintaining the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, inclusivity, and non-discrimination throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme 1: Communication Accessibility

The goal of accessibility is to prevent educational, digital, and physical obstacles that limit participation and success, especially for students with disabilities. (Panigrahi, 2025)

Sub-theme 1.1: Teacher-Student Communication

According to Respondent 13 “ The communication instruments accessible to me in the classroom include textbooks, notebooks, whiteboards, markers, projectors, computers, and mobile devices.”

Similarly, Respondent 6 “I communicate with my teachers and classmates through sign language, written notes, text messages, and facial expressions. They also help by speaking clearly and using visual aids.”

In Addition Through visual aids such as note writing, chat messages, and gestures. When interpreter is available, communication becomes easier.(Respondent 8)

Sub-theme 1.2: Peer Communication

“ The biggest challenge is lack of sign language proficiency among most teachers and classmates. Many lessons are delivered only through speech, which I cannot access fully without an interpreter or visual support. There are also delays in getting my questions answered when I have to write everything down. Group work and casual conversations are difficult because others often don't know how to

communicate with me, so I sometimes feel left out. Noise or poor lighting in classrooms also makes it harder if I try to lip-read or see signs clearly.”- Respondent 7

“Limited access to sign language interpretation, and communication barriers during group work and meetings.”- Respondent 8

“When my classmates voluntarily ask to learn basic signs or practice fingerspelling their names, it makes me feel valued, respected, and genuinely wanted in social circles.”- Respondent 12

Sub-theme 1.3: Communication Support and Barriers

Deaf students need emotional encouragement, inclusive communication, counseling, peer support, and access to services such as sign language interpreters to help them feel accepted and succeed in school.-Respondent 13.

Limited access to sign language interpretation, and communication barriers during group work and meetings-Respondent 8

I communicate through sign language, gestures, writing, text messages, and lip-reading. My teachers and classmates also use visual aids and written instructions to help me understand lessons and conversations.-Respondent 4

Theme 2: Learning Environment

Results show that all three of the Framework's domains helped students with disabilities feel like they belonged. Effective ILE design can support social and academic outcomes and encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities. (Page et al., 2024)

Sub-theme 2.1: Classroom Experiences

limited access, lack of awareness about Deaf Community, and fast paced discussions, they affect my participation.- Respondent 5

Access to tutoring services, academic counseling, and timely feedback from teachers can also help me understand lessons better and improve my academic performance. These supports make learning more effective and engaging.- Respondent 13

My classroom learning experiences are sometimes fine and challenging. With visual learning and visual language, I can learn well. Without communication accessible, I tried to find it difficult to solve the problems such as tasks, groups, and discussion.- Respondent 15

Sub-theme 2.2: Educational Accommodations

According to Respondent 4 I would like schools to provide sign language interpreters, captioned videos, visual learning materials, accessible announcements, and teacher training on how to communicate effectively with deaf students.

According to Respondent 5 experiences are both challenging and positive when I learn best because of visually presented lessons and appreciate the efforts any teacher could do.

According to Respondent 6 I would like schools to provide sign language interpreters, captioned videos, visual learning materials, accessible announcements, and teacher training on how to communicate effectively with deaf students.

Sub-theme 2.3: Learning Challenges

According to Respondent 7 Difficulty joining group discussions, recitations, or team activities because others don't know how to communicate with me.

According to Respondent 5 limited access, lack of awareness about Deaf Community, and fast paced discussions, they affect my participation.

According to Respondent 8 Limited access to sign language interpretation, and communication barriers during group work and meetings.

Theme 3: Social Inclusion

This research emphasizes that social inclusion is not merely an administrative effort but requires comprehensive structural and cultural changes. (Sianipar, 2025)

Sub-theme 3.1: Peer Relationships

According to Respondent 3 Limited access to sign language interpretation, and communication barriers during group work and meetings.

According to Respondent 13 These adjustments help me understand lessons better and participate more effectively in class.

According to Respondent 13 I also experience nervousness when participating in class discussions or school activities. Despite these challenges, I try to stay organized, ask for help when needed, and actively participate to improve my learning experience.

Sub-theme 3.2: Sense of Belonging

According to Respondent 11 I feel welcomed when I am included and supported in class, but I feel left out when communication is too fast or unclear for me to follow.

According to Respondent 8 I feel appreciated and welcome when people treat me equally.

According to Respondent 7 I feel welcomed when someone makes the first move to greet me using signs or by writing, and when they take time to understand me instead of giving up. For example, during group projects when my classmates try to learn simple signs or write down instructions clearly, I feel like I belong. On the other hand, I often feel left out during casual conversations, recess, or school events. When everyone is talking and laughing but no one writes down what is being said or interprets it, I don't know what is happening. I also feel excluded during assemblies or announcements when information is only spoken and not shared in writing or signs. Sometimes classmates will talk about me instead of to me, which makes me feel invisible.

Sub-theme 3.3: Experiences of Exclusion

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students often face unique social-emotional challenges such as listening fatigue, communication barriers with hearing peers, and higher risks of isolation.- Respondent 9

Respondent 10 Deaf students require targeted social and emotional support to combat isolation and build resilience. Schools must foster inclusion through peer deaf-awareness training, self-advocacy development, accessible extracurriculars, and mental health resources tailored to communication needs.

According to Respondent 8 Limited access to sign language interpretation, and communication barriers during group work and meetings.

Theme 4: Educational and Support Needs

Students are encouraged to achieve positive social and academic achievements through teacher support and guidance. Students' capacity to build deep connections, have an impact on their classmates, and exhibit empathy are signs of social development. (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023)

Sub-theme 4.1: Academic Support Needs

Educational institutions can significantly impact student success. Embracing these best practices not only prepares students for academic challenges but also equips them with the skills necessary for future endeavors.- Respondent 9

Setting achievable short- and long-term goals is one key to academic success. When you set actionable objectives and incorporate skills and behaviors like time management, good study habits, and resilience, it's easier to create and execute an effective study

plan, track your progress, and reach your milestones.- Respondent 15

Access to tutoring services, academic counseling, and timely feedback from teachers can also help me understand lessons better and improve my academic performance. These supports make learning more effective and engaging.- Respondent 13

Sub-theme 4.2: Communication Support Needs

A Communication device is any piece of hardware or software that can be used to send, receive, or otherwise transmit information. This includes computers, phones, tablets, and other types of devices.- Respondent 15

According to Respondent 9 Of course, this type of communication is a two-way street and students can also talk to teachers.

I sometimes face communication challenges at school, such as feeling shy when speaking in front of the class, having difficulty expressing my ideas clearly, or misunderstanding instructions and discussions.- Respondent 13

Sub-theme 4.3: Social and Emotional Support Needs

Deaf students should receive understanding, respect, equal opportunities, counseling when needed, and support from teachers and classmates to help them feel included and confident.- Respondent 4

Deaf students need understanding, inclusion, accessible communication, and emotional support like counseling to feel confident and included in school.- Respondent 11

Counseling services, encouraging peer support and raising awareness about deaf culture.- Respondent 8

Theme 5: Recommendations for Inclusive Education

The development of targeted training programs, the provision of enough resources, and the implementation of inclusive policies are among the suggestions made to better support educators in their pursuits. To improve educational outcomes for students with aural difficulties, effective therapies and regulations must take instructors' perspectives into consideration. (Cagape et al., 2024)

Sub-theme 5.1: School-Based Improvements

Organize regular awareness activities so the whole school understands deaf culture and how to interact respectfully.- Respondent 7

Access to tutoring services, academic counseling, and timely feedback from teachers can also help me understand lessons better and improve my academic

performance. These supports make learning more effective and engaging.- Respondent 13

Provide full time, qualified Filipino Sign Language interpreters for all classes, assemblies, and school events.- Respondent 15

Sub-theme 5.2: Teacher Development

I would like schools to provide sign language interpreters, captioned videos, visual learning materials, accessible announcements, and teacher training on how to communicate effectively with deaf students.- Respondent 6

Supporting students with learning disabilities requires a personalized, multi-sensory approach. Effective strategies include breaking complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps, providing assistive technology, and utilizing visual organizers. Flexible assessments and a structured, supportive environment are also crucial for academic success.- Respondent 15

Since I was in an inclusive school, I sometimes felt welcomed when my teachers and fellow students knew sign language and communicated with me during school activities and personal conversations. I also sometimes felt left out when some teachers or students did not communicate with me through written messages, gestures, or sign language. I felt left out when teachers conducted activities only through spoken language without visual or written support, which could help Deaf students understand better.- Respondent 14

Sub-theme 5.3: Strengthening School Community Support

Teachers and counselors who understand deaf culture and can communicate directly or through an interpreter.- Respondent 7

I communicate with other students and school community members through conversations, group activities, and online messaging. I always try to be respectful and listen carefully when interacting with others.- Respondent 13

We communicate with other students and members of the school community through text and basic sign language.- Respondent 12

CONCLUSION

This study examined deaf students' needs and experiences in school communities using inclusive education as a lens. The

results showed that social inclusion, educational assistance, learning environment, communication accessibility, and school-based enhancements are crucial elements of developing an inclusive educational experience.

One of the biggest obstacles they encounter, according to the participants, is communication difficulties, specifically the scarcity of sign language interpreters and the absence of sign language competency among peers and instructors. Their involvement in class, interactions with peers, and comprehension of the lessons were all impacted by these obstacles. Despite these difficulties, respondents admitted that their educational experiences were greatly enhanced by visual teaching techniques, encouraging instructors, and assistive learning materials.

Additionally, the study discovered that deaf students appreciate inclusive teaching strategies like tailored instructional materials, captioned films, visual learning materials, accessible announcements, and individualized teacher support. Additionally, participants stressed that a greater sense of belonging within the school community is fostered by acceptance, respect, and meaningful peer interactions. However, their academic and social participation is still hampered by their experiences of exclusion during class debates, group activities, and school events.

Overall, the results show that inclusive education encompasses more than just being placed in traditional classroom settings. To guarantee that deaf kids have equal opportunity to learn, participate, and thrive, it is necessary to have accessible communication, suitable educational accommodations, qualified teachers, encouraging peers, and institutional commitment. All students will benefit from a more inclusive, encouraging, and equal learning environment if these areas are strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, schools should make sure that deaf children have access to suitable educational accommodations as part of their commitment to inclusive

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education. These include accessible school announcements, captioned instructional videos, visual learning resources, certified Filipino Sign Language (FSL) interpreters, and assistive technologies that improve learning and communication. By making these tools available, communication barriers will be lessened and equal participation in academic and school-related activities will be encouraged.

Teachers should be encouraged to take part in ongoing professional development courses that emphasize deaf awareness, inclusive education, basic Filipino Sign Language, and successful teaching techniques for deaf pupils. Teachers will be able to teach lessons more successfully and foster a classroom climate where deaf students feel valued, encouraged, and actively involved in the learning process if their knowledge and communication skills are improved.

By implementing awareness campaigns, peer education initiatives, and school-wide initiatives that promote respect and understanding for deaf culture, schools can also develop an inclusive culture. Peer relationships can be improved, social isolation can be decreased, and deaf students can feel more a part of the school community if hearing students and staff are encouraged to learn basic sign language and engage in inclusive communication.

Additionally, accessible counseling services, academic help, and emotional support programs that cater to the particular requirements of deaf students should be offered by guidance counselors and student support staff. These programs can improve students' general wellbeing and academic performance, assist them overcome communication difficulties, and boost their self-confidence.

Lastly, similar studies with larger and more varied participant groups from various educational institutions are encouraged to be carried out by future researchers. The efficacy of inclusive teaching methods, teacher preparation programs, assistive technology, and support services in raising deaf students' academic performance, communication experiences, and social inclusion may also be investigated in future studies.

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