

Lived Experiences of Hearing-Impaired Senior High School Students on Social Inclusivity: Basis for Proposed Infographic Materials

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Abstract

This study examined the lived experiences of hearing-impaired (HI) senior high school students in inclusive Social Studies classrooms at Hermosa National High School, aiming to identify challenges, coping strategies, and develop culturally relevant infographic materials to support inclusive instruction. Grounded in phenomenology and informed by Sociocultural Theory, the Contact Hypothesis, and Social Inclusion Theory, the study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design. Six HI students enrolled in the Technical-Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) track were selected through purposive criterion sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, supplemented by focus group discussions, and analyzed thematically following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) with the aid of MAXQDA software. Findings revealed that HI students experience significant communication barriers, academic struggles, and social challenges, including difficulty understanding spoken language, limited participation, and experiences of isolation and discrimination. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through persistence, patience, and reliance on family and school support systems. The study also identified the need for accessible instructional materials, leading to the development of infographic resources that translate abstract Social Studies concepts into visual formats to enhance comprehension, empathy, and participation. The study concludes that inclusive education must go beyond physical integration by fostering communication accessibility, equitable participation, and supportive classroom environments. It recommends the integration of infographic materials, teacher training in Filipino Sign Language, and strengthened institutional support for inclusive practices. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing disparities faced by learners with disabilities, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by fostering inclusive and participatory educational environments. The findings contribute to educational, social, and institutional sustainability by supporting inclusive pedagogies, strengthening community awareness, and guiding policy and classroom practices toward equitable and responsive education.

Keywords: Academic struggles, communication barriers, hearing-impaired students, inclusive education, infographic materials, phenomenology, social inclusion, Social Studies

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right essential for personal development, social integration, and justice. Despite global commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, learners with disabilities—particularly those with hearing impairment—continue to face significant barriers in accessing meaningful learning experiences. This study examines the lived experiences of hearing-impaired (HI) senior high school students in inclusive Social Studies classrooms and proposes contextually relevant interventions to enhance their participation, communication, and social integration.

1.1 Background on Inclusive Social Studies Education for Hearing-Impaired Senior High School Students

Inclusive education remains a global priority, yet its implementation is uneven, especially for learners with disabilities. The World Health Organization reported that over 430 million individuals worldwide experience hearing loss, including 34 million children, many of whom face communication and inclusion challenges in educational settings (WHO, 2024). Although frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement promote inclusive practices, their application remains inconsistent (UNESCO, 1994). In the Philippine context, Republic Act 11106 (2018) institutionalized Filipino Sign Language (FSL) to strengthen the rights of hearing-impaired learners. However, challenges persist, including declining enrollment of learners with disabilities and inadequate teacher preparation and institutional support (PSA, 2022; PIA, 2021; Paga, 2023). These issues are particularly critical in Social Studies, a subject that relies heavily on verbal interaction, collaboration, and cultural discourse. Without inclusive strategies, HI students risk exclusion from meaningful participation in civic and academic discussions.

1.2 Themes on Communication, Academic Participation, and Social Integration of HI Students

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of communication, interaction, and inclusive participation in learning environments. Sociocultural Theory highlights the role of social interaction in cognitive development, while the Contact Hypothesis underscores the value of interaction in reducing prejudice. Social Inclusion Theory further reinforces the necessity of equitable participation in fostering inclusive societies. Across these perspectives, a common theme emerges: effective inclusion depends on accessible communication, supportive environments, and collaborative engagement. However, despite these theoretical insights, there remains limited empirical research focusing on the lived experiences of HI students in local public school contexts, particularly within Social Studies classrooms.

1.3 Global, National, and Local Context of HI Learners in Inclusive Classrooms

Globally, inclusive education policies advocate for equal access, yet practical barriers persist for learners with hearing impairment (WHO, 2024; UNESCO, 1994). Nationally, despite legislative support through Republic Act 11106 (2018), implementation gaps are evident in declining enrollment rates and insufficient institutional readiness (PSA, 2022; PIA, 2021; Paga, 2023). At the local level, these challenges manifest in classroom settings where communication barriers, limited instructional adaptations, and insufficient support systems hinder the participation of HI students. In subjects such as Social Studies, where dialogue and collaboration are central, these barriers significantly affect academic engagement and social integration.

1.4 Phenomenological and Social Theories Supporting HI Students' Classroom Experiences

This study is grounded in phenomenology, particularly Husserl's approach, which focuses on understanding lived experiences through openness, bracketing, and thematic analysis. This framework enables an in-depth exploration of the experiences of HI students in inclusive classrooms. The study also draws from Sociocultural Theory, the Contact Hypothesis, and Social Inclusion Theory, which collectively emphasize the importance of interaction, communication, and equitable participation in learning. These perspectives inform the analysis of how classroom processes—such as communication, participation, and pedagogical practices—shape the experiences of HI learners. The conceptual framework positions student characteristics (age, sex, strand, GPA, and family income) and contextual factors (school policies, teacher preparedness, and peer dynamics) as influencing classroom processes. These processes, in turn, shape students' lived experiences in communication, academic engagement, and social integration, ultimately informing the development of inclusive instructional interventions.

1.5 Research Gap on Lived Experiences of HI Senior High School Students in Social Studies

Despite existing policies and theoretical frameworks supporting inclusive education, there is limited local research examining the lived experiences of hearing-impaired senior high school students in public schools. Current studies often overlook the specific challenges encountered in communication, academic participation, and social integration within subject-specific contexts such as Social Studies. This study addresses this gap by investigating the experiences of HI learners in Hermosa National High School during School Year 2019–2020. It aims to identify challenges, examine coping strategies, and develop culturally relevant infographic materials to support inclusive Social Studies instruction. By focusing on lived experiences, the study provides context-specific insights that can inform inclusive practices and interventions.

1.6 SDG Alignment of Inclusive Education for Hearing-Impaired Learners

This study aligns primarily with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which promotes inclusive and equitable access to education for all learners. By addressing barriers faced by hearing-impaired students, the research contributes to improving inclusivity and accessibility in educational systems. It also supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, as it seeks to minimize disparities in educational participation and outcomes for learners with disabilities. Additionally, the study relates to SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as inclusive education fosters social cohesion, equity, and active civic participation.

1.7 Multidisciplinary Sustainability Contribution of Inclusive Social Studies Education

This study contributes to educational sustainability by promoting inclusive teaching practices that ensure equitable learning opportunities for students with hearing impairment. It supports socio-economic sustainability by empowering HI learners to participate meaningfully in education and future civic engagement. The research also advances community and cultural sustainability by fostering empathy, diversity, and social inclusion within classroom environments. Through the development of infographic materials, the study contributes to innovation and communication sustainability, providing accessible instructional resources that enhance understanding and participation. Furthermore, the findings inform policy and institutional sustainability by guiding educators, administrators, and curriculum planners in implementing inclusive strategies that respond to the needs of learners with disabilities. Ultimately, the study strengthens inclusive education as a foundation for a more equitable and socially responsible society.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of HI senior high school students regarding social inclusion at Hermosa National High School during School Year 2019–2020. Phenomenology was selected to capture the essence of participants' experiences and to identify common themes across their narratives.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Hermosa National High School, where HI students were integrated into regular senior high school classes. The setting provided a context for examining inclusive education practices and the experiences of HI learners in mainstream classrooms.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of six hearing-impaired senior high school students enrolled in the Technical-Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) track. These participants were selected based on their direct experience of transitioning from self-contained classes to inclusive classroom environments.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive criterion sampling was used to select participants who met specific inclusion criteria. These included students who were enrolled at Hermosa National High School during School Year 2019–2020, had previously attended self-contained classes in junior high school, and were currently mainstreamed into regular senior high school classes.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to gather information on academic, social, and emotional experiences, as well as coping strategies and support systems. To ensure clarity and appropriateness for HI learners, the instrument was reviewed by professionals in English language, Social Studies, and guidance counseling. A pilot test was conducted with a similar population to validate the instrument and refine the questions.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Institutional approval was obtained from the Schools Division of Bataan, and informed consent and assent were secured from both parents and participants. Individual interviews were conducted using the semi-structured guide, with the assistance of a trained teacher-interpreter recognized by the Philippine Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PRID). A focus group discussion was also conducted to encourage peer reflection and validate emerging themes. Interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes, while the focus group discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes. Data collection continued until saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of new insights.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Interview and focus group discussion data were transcribed and analyzed thematically following the framework of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). Significant statements were coded, organized into sub-themes, and synthesized into broader themes. The analysis was supported by MAXQDA software, which facilitated the organization and interpretation of qualitative data.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles in research involving individuals with disabilities. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured, with participants given the right to withdraw at any time. Consent forms included permission for audio or video recording. Data were anonymized, and raw recordings were deleted after transcription. The study complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences of Hearing-Impaired Students in Inclusive Social Studies Classrooms

3.1.1 Communication Barriers

The findings revealed that HI students experienced significant communication barriers in inclusive classrooms. Participants reported difficulty understanding spoken language, inability to express their ideas effectively, and feelings of low self-esteem. They described struggles in comprehending teachers who relied solely on verbal instruction and difficulties in interacting with hearing classmates, often resorting to writing or typing to communicate. These challenges also led to social exclusion, as some students felt hesitant or unwelcome in group activities. These results highlight the central role of communication in inclusive education. The absence of sign language use and accessible communication methods limits

student participation and understanding. This supports the Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of interaction and dialogue in learning, and aligns with findings by Alshutwi et al., (2020), who noted that HI students perform better when communication tools are available.

3.1.2 Academic Struggles

The results showed that HI students encountered academic difficulties, particularly in understanding lessons, interacting with teachers and peers, and maintaining satisfactory grades. Participants reported challenges in following discussions due to communication gaps, which affected their comprehension of subject matter and overall academic performance. Limited teacher support and insufficient instructional adjustments further contributed to these struggles. These findings suggest that academic challenges are closely linked to communication barriers and instructional limitations. The lack of accessible teaching strategies hinders comprehension, especially in subjects requiring conceptual understanding such as Social Studies. This aligns with Rodriguez et al., (2024), who emphasized the effectiveness of visual aids in improving comprehension among HI learners and underscores the need for differentiated and inclusive pedagogical approaches.

3.1.3 Social Challenges

The findings indicated that HI students experienced social challenges, including isolation, bullying, and difficulty forming relationships with hearing peers. Participants expressed feelings of exclusion and hesitation in engaging with classmates due to communication limitations. Instances of discrimination and lack of understanding from peers and, in some cases, teachers were also reported. These results demonstrate that inclusion is not achieved through physical integration alone. Social inclusion requires meaningful interaction supported by appropriate structures. This reflects the Contact Hypothesis of Allport, which posits that interaction reduces prejudice only when supported by institutional conditions. Without such support, HI students remain marginalized despite being present in inclusive settings.

3.2 Coping Strategies and Support Systems

3.2.1 Personal and Social Coping Mechanisms

The findings revealed that HI students employed various coping strategies, including persistence, patience, and efforts to adapt to communication barriers. Participants demonstrated resilience by continuing their studies despite challenges and by attempting to teach sign language to peers and teachers. They also relied on support from family members, particularly parents and siblings, as well as available school resources. These results highlight the agency and resilience of HI learners in navigating inclusive environments. Their reliance on personal determination and external support reflects the importance of both individual and structural factors in achieving inclusion. This is consistent with the Social Inclusion Theory which emphasizes equitable participation and belonging, and supports the findings of Magasa (2023), who noted that HI students often depend on family and peer networks to overcome systemic barriers.

3.3 Instructional Intervention Through Infographic Materials

3.3.1 Need for Visual and Inclusive Learning Resources

The findings showed a clear need for accessible instructional materials, particularly visual aids, to support HI learners. Participants emphasized difficulty in understanding lessons without sign language and expressed a desire for more inclusive communication methods. Visual representations were identified as helpful in bridging communication gaps and improving comprehension. These results justify the development of infographic materials as an intervention to enhance inclusivity in Social Studies education. The use of visual tools aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory by providing mediated learning resources and supports the Contact Hypothesis by encouraging shared understanding among students. Studies by Delfin et al., (2023) and Rodriguez et al., (2024) similarly confirm that visual aids significantly improve comprehension and participation among HI learners.

3.3.2 Application of Infographic Materials in Social Studies Instruction

The study developed an infographic material titled Hearing Beyond Silence: Enhancing Inclusivity in Schools, designed to present the lived experiences, coping strategies, and social realities of HI students. The material highlights key areas such as challenges in inclusive classrooms, coping mechanisms, and principles of social justice and inclusivity. It translates abstract Social Studies concepts into accessible visual formats to promote empathy and understanding. The infographic supports curriculum competencies related to human rights, intersubjectivity, empathy, and respect for diversity in subjects such as Community Engagement, Solidarity, and Citizenship and Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person. By using visual elements and inclusive strategies, the material promotes awareness among teachers, peers, and administrators while encouraging inclusive classroom practices. It also empowers HI students to participate more actively in academic and civic discourse, fostering a culture of empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility within the school community.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study revealed that hearing-impaired (HI) students experience significant challenges in inclusive classrooms, particularly in communication barriers, emotional difficulties, and social isolation, yet they demonstrate resilience through

persistence, patience, and reliance on support systems. Anchored in Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, the findings affirm that learning is inherently social and requires inclusive structures that support communication diversity and collaboration. These results are consistent with the Social Inclusion Theory emphasizing equitable participation and belonging. The proposed infographic material serves as an accessible and inclusive instructional tool that enhances empathy, understanding, and participation in Social Studies subjects, contributing to a classroom environment grounded in social inclusivity, social justice, and social responsibility. Overall, the study highlights that true inclusion extends beyond physical integration and requires a supportive and equitable learning environment that enables HI students to actively participate and thrive.

The study recommends the integration of the developed infographic materials in teaching Social Studies subjects in senior high school, particularly in topics related to human rights, community engagement, intersubjectivity, communication, counseling, and social work, to promote inclusivity and empathy. It further suggests that teachers handling HI students develop similar intervention materials, undergo training in basic Filipino Sign Language (FSL), and participate in seminars on inclusive education. Additionally, schools are encouraged to incorporate inclusive education initiatives into student programs, disseminate infographic materials through guidance offices, and regularly update these resources to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in supporting the academic and social development of HI students.

The study is limited to six hearing-impaired senior high school students from Hermosa National High School, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The focus on a single school setting and specific academic track may not fully represent the experiences of all HI learners in different contexts.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving individuals with disabilities. Institutional approval was secured from the Schools Division of Bataan prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent and assent obtained from participants and their parents. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Consent was also obtained for audio or video recording, and all data were anonymized, with raw recordings deleted after transcription. The study adhered to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

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