Learner Diversity in Inclusive Classrooms: The Role of Instructional Language, Gender, and Disability

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Abstract: The study focused on the language of teaching, gender, and disability issues, as well as the consequences for educational practices, to examine learner diversity in inclusive classrooms. Two inclusive secondary schools in the Uttar Pradesh region of India were the sources of the data used in this qualitative research approach to answer the research question. The research participants, who were teachers and students, and the schools were collected using a purposive sample technique. Data gathering methods included open-ended interviews, in-class observations, and focus group discussions. Findings point to difficulties teachers, particularly those working with students with disabilities, have while teaching mixed-gender courses. Boys predominated in some classroom dialogues, but overall, interactions between girls and boys were positive. It is advised that during initial teacher training and ongoing in-service training, all teachers receive training on how to manage students with special needs and become familiar with the overall concept of learner variety. Finally, it is advised that a different study be carried out employing a larger sample size, other sorts of participants with special needs, and quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Parents of children with special needs should also take part in the suggested study.

Key words: Disability, gender inequality, inclusive education, the instruction language, learner diversity

INTRODUCTION:
It is crucial that educational practices take student diversity into account if inclusive societies are to be built, sustained, and promoted on a worldwide scale. The first step in creating inclusive societies would be to implement inclusive best practices in educational institutions. The process of transforming schools and other learning environments so that they can accommodate all students—boys and girls, those from different ethnic groups and linguistic minorities, those who live in rural areas, and those with special learning needs—is known as inclusive education. According to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, inclusive education is a system of education in which all children, youths, and adults, regardless of their varied backgrounds and abilities, are enrolled, actively participate in, and succeed in regular schools and other educational programs.

All children and adults who participate in inclusive education have more access to educational possibilities. Its goal is to remove exclusion brought on by unfavorable views and a failure to recognize differences in ability, gender, sexual orientation, language, color, economic background, and social class. There are many different contexts in which education takes place, including formal and informal ones, families, and the greater community. Therefore, inclusive education is a serious issue. It is essential to ensure social justice, promote the development of more inclusive society, and provide all pupils with a high-quality education.

It's important to note that India has embraced the inclusive education model. Hindi has also been designated as the nation's official language of instruction at all levels of education. Despite the change, if the Language of instruction is not handled effectively during the teaching and learning processes, it could be one of the obstacles to learners with impairments acquiring knowledge. In general, engagement and academic achievement of children with special needs are likely to be limited if they are not engaged in or interacting well with their peers and teachers during the teaching and learning processes. This is so because people can express their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and views to others who can understand what is being communicated. Language is a method of employing arbitrary meaningful symbols. Individuals can engage, make friends, and become acquainted through this process.

Language plays a crucial role in education in this regard, especially during the teaching and learning processes since it enables the transfer of educational messages from teachers to students and vice versa, resulting in reciprocal communication in both written and spoken language forms. The language of instruction needs to be thoroughly understood by both teachers and students for learning to take place. In fact, many students struggle to understand what they are being taught in classroom language exams.

The study's objectives:
It was crucial to undertake a study on gender conversational dominance in classrooms with children who have special needs since research shows that females perform better in languages than boys and that those girls talk more than boys in casual conversation. Discussions about whether India should use Hindi as the primary language of instruction in all educational institutions and these research findings were the main motivations for the study. The current study's objective was to examine the diversity of students in the classrooms with an emphasis on issues related to gender, the language of instruction, and disabilities. This study was an
important effort to determine the degree of gender conversational dominance among students with hearing loss and albinism in inclusive secondary schools in Uttar Pradesh. The researchers were also curious as to whether students in inclusive secondary schools interacted more in Hindi than in English classrooms, or the opposite. The following issues were dealt with to accomplish these broad objectives.

i. How are the seating arrangements in the classrooms used for English and Hindi language instruction and study?

ii. In English and Hindi language classes, how frequently do teachers question male and female students who have a hearing impairment or albinism?

How much do male and female students reply to inquiries from teachers in English and Hindi, whether they have a hearing impairment or albinism?

iv. Among male and female students, who may or may not have a hearing impairment or albinism, who predominately raise questions in English in the classroom?

v. What difficulties do teachers have when dealing with hearing-impaired and albino kids in inclusive settings?

**Importance of Research**

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

According to Nidhi Singal, one of the major policy challenges for monitoring progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals is the absence of children with disabilities in data on educational access and learning. [19]. By Shweta Eidnani The findings highlighted how important it is to adopt an appreciating, asset-based, and collaborative approach in all interactions with teachers and school leaders as well as the importance of effective classroom instruction and school leadership as steppingstones in the causal chain. [18] With a greater focus on how teachers understand and address the needs of students with disabilities, Shruti Taneja-Johansson studies the beliefs and behaviors of mainstream instructors in rural government schools. [16] Bephyer Parey investigates the attitudes of primary and secondary school teachers in Trinidad toward including children with disabilities in the classroom using qualitative research methods. Data [15]. Maria Paseka. Implementing inclusion, attitudes toward inclusive education, and views of inclusive teaching methods and resources are all significant factors. [14].

**Conceptual and theoretical considerations of the study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Flanders's Interaction Analysis Technique with Modifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student-teacher Interaction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher’s direct influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher’s indirect influence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Talk (Boys and Girls)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Responses from students (boys/girls)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students (boys and females) discuss initiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silence and confusion (boys/girls)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Gender Role Theory and Flander’s Model of Classroom Interaction were both applied in this study. The modified Flander's model of classroom interaction was used to discuss and identify the degree of gender dominance and interactions between male and female, as well as disabled and non-disabled, students in inclusive classrooms. Which is shown in Table 1.

**Flander's Interaction Model with Modifications:**

Gender Role In addition to Flander's approach, Gender Role Theory provided guidance for the study's investigation of gender dominance in classroom teaching and learning environments. According to the theory’s proponents, gender differences in behavior and personality traits are, at least in part, socially constructed and, as a result, are the outcome of socialization experiences that may come from in-class instruction and learning [5]. The classroom observations for this study included a variety of presentation methods, such as group discussions and direct instruction.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
Design and method of the research:
The study population, study location, and sample techniques:
The study was carried out in Uttar Pradesh, where two secondary schools enrolled students with albinism and hearing difficulties. Teachers and students were included in the study population because they interact with handicapped children in schools. The schools and participants were chosen using a non-probability purposive sampling technique. 110 individuals made up the study sample, as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School and Type of Participants</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Albinism</td>
<td>Female: 2 (1.82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 2 (1.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td>22 (20.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>53 (48.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>14 (15.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>5 (4.59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (9.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>54 (50.96%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Methods:
The pertinent data for the study was gathered through open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions. These are descriptions of them:

Semi-structured interviews:
To help the researcher understand how gender dominates language teaching in the classroom, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were done with instructors and students at School B. At School A, both teachers and pupils declined to take part in interviews without providing specific justifications.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): To understand more about the approaches utilized to instruct male and female pupils in the classrooms, four focus group conversations with eight members each were held with students in School B. They were also utilized to gather information on whether there was a gender imbalance in the way that questions were posed and answered in the courses. There were two women in each group. 16 students from School A were specifically chosen to take part in focus group talks. Four women and four men made up the gender split of the contestants. There were 21 participants from the school, however, only five male teachers took part in the survey. Focus group dissuasions were resisted by female pupils. They flatly declined for reasons that are unclear because they did not wish to share them.

Classroom observations: Data on the interactions between teachers and students as well as learner-learner interactions in each school were gathered through four non-participatory classroom observations (two for each language). To determine whether gender prejudice and/or gender stereotyping existed, data were gathered concentrating on the level of questions in accordance with Bloom’s taxonomy levels of questions while referring to gender dominance. At School A, there were two observations made in the classrooms, but there were four at School B.

Reliability of the study:
Building trust in the research process is one way to ensure the validity of its findings and increase its trustworthiness. This was determined in this study by following the criteria for appraising qualitative research established by Elias Avramidis as described in Teachers’ attitudes towards integration: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (2002). The following way the constructs were applied as described by Rabea Malik, (2022, p.15)

- **Credibility**: “addresses the question of whether the participant opinions and the researchers’ portrayal of them are consistent.” In this study, it was accomplished via the triangulation methodology, in which various data collection techniques were used. Additionally, familiarity with the study regions was encouraged to minimize any obstacles to the
efficient completion of the research.

- **Dependability**: involves the researcher giving the reader adequate information to judge the reliability of the study and the researcher involves providing the reader with sufficient details so they can assess the validity of the study and the researcher. The researchers made sure the questions were open-ended and consistent by allowing for clarification. The material gathered by the researcher through interpretation and videotape was made available to the participants so they could check that it matched what they had said. We asked the same questions to different individuals to see whether there were any commonalities or variances.

- **Confirmability**: demands the researcher to provide evidence for their results and interpretations. There were two steps in the confirmability process: First, the researchers acknowledged the study's shortcomings and made recommendations for how to strengthen those areas in similar future studies. To assure triangulation of the data, various data collection techniques, and sources were used, like the believability requirement.

- **Transferability**: whether conclusions are transferable to situations other than the one being studied. To enable comparisons across and among contexts, the study's context has been sufficiently specified, and the findings have been succinctly presented.

**Ethical considerations:**

Whether or whether conclusions can be applied outside of the situation under study. To enable comparisons across and among contexts, the study's context has been sufficiently specified, and the findings have been succinctly presented.

**Data analysis:**

The data were analyzed conceptually, which produced the themes that are provided in the findings section. Given the qualitative nature of the study, meaningful units of analysis were obtained by using words, phrases, and sentences to code and categorize the data. This allowed the researchers to accurately portray the diversity of learners in inclusive classes.

**Seating arrangements:**

Regarding the gender issue, there was no female separation in the classes. However, the seating configurations featured some form of constructive segregation. Boys' and girls' rows were segregated. This type of seating was chosen without any justification. However, the setup is thought to be too traditional, making it likely that more subtle gendered norms and indoctrination will continue in the classrooms, especially when teachers fail to make conscious efforts to actively engage girls in classroom interactions [9]. During the teaching and learning processes, teachers must use instructional strategies and classroom management techniques that ensure all students have an equal opportunity to participate. **Gender predominance in responses to teachers' queries in English and Hindi language classrooms among students with albinism and hearing impairment another goal** of the study was to examine how learners with albinism responded to teachers' queries in English and Hindi language classrooms. The results of that analysis are shown here. According to the findings from FGDs at School A, girls outperformed boys when it came to answering questions in both English and Kiswahili as well as literature. One male participant responded, "It's because languages are simple," while laughing when asked why girls were good at languages. Boys are adept at the understanding structure. In Form Three, boys preferred science to the arts. This teacher has a gender prejudice since he believes that girls are good at languages because they are straightforward.

Results from School B revealed that every student took part in the responses and questions. They were given hearing aids, but they weren't functioning well despite that. Both boys and girls performed well and received encouragement from their subject professors in terms of comprehension, summary, discussions, and organization. Various topics were discussed in FGDs with Form Three D students overall. According to the students, those who had hearing problems did not receive adequate assistance from teachers or fellow students, which caused them to perform poorly on exams. Participants concurred that teachers often instruct without us.

Additionally, the researchers wanted information from the teacher in charge of academics at School A regarding the performance of kids with special needs. The latter said that the pupils were doing well. On the other side, when questioned about the causes of some students' poor performance in the two languages, particularly those who had hearing difficulties, one student responded as follows:

There aren't many instructors in sign language. Those who are not familiar with sign language struggle to translate some words. Teachers of sign language do a terrific job. They do a good job of instructing. The others who are not educated in sign language disregard us. They don't care about us or try to educate us. They don't communicate with signs.

**Conversational dominance in language comprehension:**

Various topics were discussed in FGDs with Form Three D students overall. According to the students, those who had hearing problems did not receive adequate assistance from teachers or fellow students, which caused them to perform poorly on exams.
Participants concurred that teachers often instruct without using chalkboards. Only those who attended English-medium schools excel. Since the majority of them attended English-medium schools, girls were said to perform even better in English. Additionally, they did better in Hindi.

The participants, however, responded that there was no difference between males and girls when asked who was more dominating in both Hindi and English Literature classes. They provided a justification, stating that it might be because languages are simple. This claim is untrue because it is possible for one gender to perform better than the other; for example, boys may perform better than girls in subjects that are seen as easy, and vice versa. Boys were rated higher than girls in terms of structure, but girls were rated higher in terms of composition and written assignments. What one of the teachers said is as follows:

Boys and girls are equally proficient in English and Hindi language. People think learning languages is simple. It is unclear why boys excel at language structure but not at summaries. Overall, girls are excellent writers. Additionally, boys are very cautious and eager to learn. They work together and show no signs of fear. The findings differ from the Boys’ Reading Commission report from 2021, which claimed that girls read more and score better on reading tests than boys.

The outcomes were somewhat different at School A. Discussions with focus group participants initially suggested there was little difference in the breadth of questioning between boys and girls. But as the talks progressed, it became apparent that boys outnumbered girls in posing questions to the lecturers. The participants responded that boys asked more questions than ladies in both Hindi and English classes when asked who asked more questions. The arguments are supported by the following claims: In the classroom, boys predominately ask inquiries. Girl’s fear being criticized if they speak English incorrectly for whatever reason. Girls lack the self-assurance to take the floor and respond to inquiries. Unexpectedly, one teacher at the same school observed no differences in language dominance and stated the following:

I cannot locate a dividing line. There are female students who predominate in discourse, while boys predominate in other classrooms. So, I can't really say who does it. Male students predominate in some classrooms while female students do so in others. Unexpectedly, one teacher at the same school observed no differences in language dominance and stated the following: I don't understand a line of demarcation, another teacher remarked. It is the guys in some classes. In other cases, it's the women. One of my students who have hearing loss does well in class.

Managing hearing-impaired pupils and students with albinism in inclusive classrooms can be difficult:
The study examined the difficulties faced by kids who have hearing loss and those who are albino. According to responses from research participants in both institutions, there is a lack of cooperation in the classrooms for kids with hearing impairments between impaired students and their non-disabled peers. Additionally, there was a clear lack of collaboration amongst teachers with and without specialization. The difficulties were caused by teachers and pupils not being able to communicate via sign language.

Dealing with hearing-impaired students can be difficult:
When the principal of the school for hearing-impaired students was questioned about how teachers support or handle students with hearing impairments in classroom interactions, he or she provided several responses, focusing on whether or not students with disabilities were being questioned by their teachers or whether the students were interactive and cooperative. He claims that both male and female students, as well as those with and without disabilities—do not fear one another. The principal believed that teachers generally employ student-centered teaching strategies because, in his words, "We try to reflect constructivism and the student is at the center of learning and expect to involve students in experiments and presentations." The principal was also of the opinion that teachers should expect students to participate in experiments and presentations.

Contrary to the Headmaster's assertions, one of the teachers stated during the discussion that it is challenging to determine which approach or teaching strategy effectively encourages students to participate actively in class. The instructor said: During the conversation, one of the teachers stated that, in contrast to the principal opinions, it is challenging to determine which approach or teaching strategy effectively encourages students to participate in class discussions. The teacher uttered, another educator stated, The teaching of students is influenced by a variety of circumstances. Due to the lack of training of certain language teachers, communication barriers are widespread. In actuality, there aren't many teachers who have received specialized training for working with pupils with disabilities. The students who attend this school have a hearing impairment. The teachers, however, lack formal education. The environment is not even suitable for the students. We don't have any educational resources.

In addition, the principal was worried about the following things. Even though they lack the ability to communicate with pupils who have hearing problems, teachers tend to be very relaxed. As a result, they do not actively help students. They keep quiet about them. The education the pupils are receiving falls short of expectations. The reason for this is a communication gap. There aren't many qualified teachers available to work with the pupils. Additionally, there is a lack of instructional and study materials. For instance, there are no PowerPoint presentations here.

The results show that teachers find it difficult to teach children who have hearing impairments and that because their teachers are
not proactive in educating them, these kids have difficulties learning. The primary difficulty, according to students from School B, was a communication barrier. Because teachers do not understand sign language, pupils with hearing impairment do not get along well with their classmates or teachers. They also highlighted that one of the obstacles was a shortage of educational resources.

Handling with hearing albinism in students:
Regarding the difficulties that albino students have, it was noted that "the students have lighting problems and that classroom windows do not have curtains thus the light affects albino students." Lighting is a challenge for albino students, who struggle to learn. Stigma in the classroom was another discovery. Unfortunately, all students with disabilities—the majority of whom had albinism—were once housed in a single classroom, where teachers stigmatized and labelled the students they were instructing. Fortunately, the pupils were split up among different classrooms. One educator expressed frustration with the difficulties of inclusion and stated the following: These students must integrate into the social structure. Although I support inclusiveness, I'm curious about the infrastructure, instructional strategies, and educational resources that have been put in place to support it. For that, we must be ready. There is a policy, but it is not properly applied.

DISCUSSIONS:
The analysis of data on student diversity in inclusive classrooms was focused on three learner diversity nexuses: the language of instruction, gender issues, and disability concerns. The results have amply demonstrated the difficulty of teaching in settings where students have a range of educational requirements and backgrounds, necessitating a lot of the teachers’ focus during the teaching and learning processes. According to the findings, some teachers were speaking at a rapid tempo when instructing in these classrooms rather than slowing down to allow the students with hearing impairments to lip-read. The results are consistent with those of Manish, Sanjeev, and Abhishek (2021) who discovered that teachers failed to ensure that pupils comprehended the material being covered in class.

The study also showed that teachers’ lack of proficiency in sign language hampered interactions in the classroom between students with and without hearing difficulties. Additionally, it was discovered that one stream of the class, where girls outnumbered boys, had more girls than boys and that this was reflected in the number of questions asked. These results are consistent with what Zhang (2010) [4] found when he investigated how to talk volume and discourse patterns varied between boys and females in the classroom. In contrast, even though there were more female students than male students, Shruti Taneja-Johansson, Nidhi Singal & Meera Samson (2022) found male dominance. The teachers’ control over the patterns of student behaviors during instruction contributed to this in part. The disparities in the results suggest that the dominance of one gender in classroom conversations may not always be caused by the sheer quantity of pupils with a given impairment. Instead, it denotes a lack of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers, who neglect to consider the distinct learning requirements of boys and girls (Mlama et al., 2010). Therefore, if we want to guarantee that boys and girls have equal access to school, it is imperative that instructors receive this type of training. When examining gender dominance among students with albinism and those with hearing impairments in English and Hindi language classrooms, the findings revealed that females led in responding to teachers in both scenarios at one of the two schools. In the other school, however, there were no distinctions in how the males and girls responded. Despite the challenges they encountered in their education, such as the lack of teachers who are educated in sign language for students with hearing impairments, it has been demonstrated that most children with special needs are functioning well academically. Like what Claes Nilholm (2021) discovered, this finding. According to the author, it is crucial to take into account how facilities and services provided by colleges and universities may need to be changed in order to accommodate the needs of students with special needs. To accommodate children with impairments, additional considerations must be made in the classroom design.

The use of the English language in the classroom has been clearly seen as a problem at the secondary school level, when students face major learning obstacles. Language barriers in the teaching and learning processes were less of an issue for students who had a strong foundation in the English language (those who attended primary schools with an English-medium curriculum), but those who did not receive their primary education in English had difficulty interacting and participating in the classroom teaching and learning processes because English is not the country's primary language of instruction at this level of education. The findings support the necessity to address the issue as stated by Peragia F. Bikongoro (2015). The question of the nation's official language of teaching may have a viable answer in Eustard Rutalemwa (2010) proposal for 50-50 bilingual education.

In fact, the data provide information on the growing learner variety in the classrooms, which is shown by learners' diverse linguistic origins with regard to the language of instruction. In order to treat all pupils fairly while teaching at the secondary school level, it is crucial for teachers to take this variable into account. In this way, it is said that the inclusion of kids in ordinary schools was successful. The findings have clearly demonstrated teachers’ incapacity to manage students with the exceptionalities, as well as a lack of the necessary teaching and learning resources to support learning for students with special needs. This is particularly true of students with hearing impairment and those who are albino. The findings corroborate the concerns voiced by Bephyre Parey, who questioned the suitability of teacher preparation programs effective instructional frameworks, and teaching/learning techniques for inclusive classrooms. Certain teachers claimed that the length of some of the topic syllabi prevented them from covering them completely in the allotted time.
According to the findings of the current study, there are several types of stigma that students with special needs, especially those who have albinism, must deal with. This became clear when every student with a disability—the majority of whom had albinism—was put in a single classroom. The results make it very evident that adjustments must be done in the areas of teacher preparation, exchange opportunities, and learning settings.

LIMITATIONS:
Some of the study’s participating teachers forbade the researchers from gathering data while sitting behind their classes. The data collection from classroom interactions was harmed by this circumstance. The researchers employed a triangulation of three data gathering methods, namely open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group talks, to get around the problem. Another obstacle was the lack of secondary schools in Tanzania with a focus on inclusive education for students with hearing and vision impairments. The study made use of institutions for pupils who were albino and had hearing impairment. A second study on the subject that includes a somewhat larger sample size is required because the original study was restricted to only two secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
The research was conducted to examine concerns related to learner diversity at two inclusive secondary schools in the Uttar Pradesh region, and the results are reported in this paper. To examine gender conversational dominance in Hindi and English language classes, it examined interactions among students who had hearing loss and albinism in the classroom. The results have demonstrated that background inequalities in terms of the Language of instruction cause some students' classroom instructions to reinforce exclusionary practices. Additionally, there have been issues with stigmatization, poor teacher-student interactions, and a lack of training on how to deal with students who have hearing impairments and those who are albinos. There have also been issues with the accessibility and use of special equipment for students who have hearing impairments. The conclusions are supported by the following recommendations for future study, regulatory changes, and practical application.

1. To accommodate all learners in their classrooms, teachers should consider the varied linguistic backgrounds of their pupils, particularly when they begin teaching secondary school freshmen.
2. Teachers of sign language should be trained and hired by the government. All educators who work in inclusive settings with pupils who have hearing problems ought to become sign language proficient. This suggests that all teacher candidates should receive training on how to deal with special needs kids in their courses; this training ought to be a prerequisite for all candidates hoping to teach in inclusive schools, enabling teachers to accommodate all pupils.
3. In-service training for teachers is necessary so they can identify and assist students with disabilities in the classroom.
4. To foster collaboration between learners with and without disabilities, one must remember that Tanzania values inclusivity.
5. Both teachers and students should buy and use the specialized teaching and learning resources for deaf students.
6. This study should be repeated in other areas with a larger sample of institutions serving students with various forms of disability.

References:


