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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Perceptions of Teachers and Students towards the Inclusion of Students
with Hearing Impairment at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta
Town

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June, 2025

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Special Needs Education

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*This thesis is submitted to the Department of Special Needs Education in
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DECLARATION

I, Tezera Getachew, declare that this research paper entitled "Perceptions of Teachers and Students towards Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town" is my original work and has not been accepted for publication in any form to any academic institution/university as a prerequisite for any academic credential.

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This is to certify that the Thesis entitled “Perceptions of teachers and students towards Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town” is a work done by Mr. Tezera Getachew which he has done personally under my close supervision and guidance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- EMoE: Ethiopian Ministry of Education
- FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- FGD: Focus Group Discussion
- IDEIA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
- IEP: Individualized Education Plan
- ESL: Ethiopian Sign Language
- SNE: Special Needs Education
- SWHI: Students with Hearing Impairments
- UDL: Universal Design for Learning
- UN: United Nations
- UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

ABSTRACT

The research was a qualitative case study that examined the perceptions of teachers and students towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town. Framed by the social model of disability, the study sought to understand how inclusion for students with hearing impairments is conceptualized within mainstream educational settings. A total of thirty-three participants were purposively selected from the population of ten general education teachers, fifteen hearing students and eight students with hearing impairments. Data was gathered using observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The findings reveal a significant disconnect: while participants conceptually supported inclusion, its practical implementation was severely hampered by communication barriers, primarily teachers' limited sign language proficiency. Students with hearing impairments indicated that during group work or classroom discussion they often felt socially isolated. Hearing students expressed that they were empathetic but would find it hard to communicate effectively. The teachers stated they valued the inclusion of students with hearing impairments, but they also felt their lack of training and the absence of the necessary support posed a barrier. It reaches the conclusion that the building of sign language proficiency among teachers, expansion of support services, and development of more positive perceptions are the main ingredients for effective inclusion of students with hearing impairments.

Keywords: *inclusion, hearing impairments, teachers' perceptions, students' perception*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Inclusive education has been a significant focus of global education policies, aiming to provide equitable access to quality for all students, including those with disabilities (Ainscow, 2020). Among these efforts, the inclusion of learners with disabilities fosters diversity, promotes social equality, and enhances learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2021). However, the success of inclusive education practices often depends on the perceptions of teachers and students, which play a critical role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of students with hearing impairments in inclusive classrooms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) places inclusive education as among the primary human rights, stressing the need for participation in educational activities devoid of any form of discrimination (UN, 2006). Nevertheless, researchers have noted additional barriers to inclusion, such as the perception and attitudes held by both teachers and learners, which are detrimental to its implementation (Luckner & Muir, 2001). For instance, Antia, Stinson, and Gaustand (2002) highlighted that students with hearing impairments have profound communication and social integration problems within the school environment. These challenges often result in social exclusion and hinder learning. However, they can be mitigated when teachers and peers adopt inclusive perceptions. (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Luckner & Muir, 2001).

Teachers' perceptions are particularly critical to including learners with hearing impairment, as they influence how students with hearing impairments are treated and integrated into the classroom. Teachers with positive perceptions of inclusion are more likely to encourage participation and integration, fostering a sense of belonging for students with hearing impairments (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Conversely, teachers who view the inclusion of these students as a challenge or burden may create barriers to effective integration, whether consciously or unconsciously (Luckner & Muir, 2001). Similarly, students' perceptions of their learners with hearing impairments significantly affect the latter's social and academic

experiences. Supportive perceptions from peers can enhance the confidence and perception of students with hearing impairments, while negative perceptions can lead to isolation and exclusion (Antia et al., 2002).

Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy (FDRE 2012) supports inclusive education, pushing for students with hearing impairments to attend mainstream schools. Yet, teachers and students have mixed perceptions on inclusion for those with hearing impairments. Belay and Abebe (2020) found that many Ethiopian teachers back inclusive education overall but worry about including students with hearing impairments because of potential communication issues. Tefera (2019) also pointed out that students often don't grasp hearing impairments well, which affects how they interact with and see their peers who have these impairments. These perceptions of positive or negative have a big impact on how well inclusive education works (Tadesse & Damtew 2021).

Cultural beliefs surrounding disability in Ethiopia also play a role in shaping school-based perceptions. Melesse (2018) found that stigma and misconceptions about disabilities contribute to biased perceptions among both teachers and students. Hearing impairments are often viewed as limitations rather than as differences that can be accommodated within the school system. Addressing these cultural barriers is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive school environment (Melesse, 2018).

While some research has been conducted in Ethiopia on the inclusion of students with hearing impairments, these studies have been limited in scope and geographical representation. For instance, Teshome (2016) investigated teachers' perceptions of inclusion at Yeka Primary School in Addis Ababa and found generally positive perceptions, though teachers had limited understanding of hearing impairments. Similarly, Birhanu (2015) studied inclusion at Bole Secondary School and noted the importance of positive perceptions for successful implementation, but this research focused solely on secondary education and did not include the perspectives of students with hearing impairments. Significantly, no previous study has specifically investigated the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town. This gap represents a critical area for research.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the perceptions of teachers and students at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the local context and inform national efforts aimed at developing more effective inclusive education practices in Ethiopia, in alignment with national policies and international commitments such as the UNCRPD (2006).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the global recognition of inclusive education as a means of ensuring equal access to quality education for all students, including those with disabilities, a significant challenge persists in effectively implementing inclusive practices for learners with hearing impairments in mainstream schools (Ainscow, 2020). In Ethiopia, while the Education and Training Policy (FDRE Ministry of Education, 2012) emphasizes the inclusion of students with disabilities, students with hearing impairments continue to encounter multiple barriers that hinder their academic achievement and social integration. Among these barriers are potentially negative or ill-informed perceptions held by both teachers and students (Belay & Abebe, 2020; Tefera, 2019; Melesse, 2018), which contribute to their marginalization within the education system.

In Ethiopian schools, students with hearing impairments (SWHIs) face diverse perceptions regarding their abilities and needs, directly impacting the success of inclusive education. Research suggests that teachers may lack the necessary training and resources to effectively support these students, unintentionally hindering their learning progress (Aregawi, 2018; Tefera, 2019). Furthermore, the perceptions of fellow students towards their peers with hearing impairments can significantly influence the school environment, either fostering inclusion and belonging through positive perceptions or leading to exclusion and isolation through negative ones (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Melesse, 2018). When these perceptions are coupled with inadequate support systems, they create substantial limitations to the full participation of students with hearing impairments in education and impede the realization of their rights as outlined in national and international frameworks like the UNCRPD (2006). For instance, even in schools where teachers express general support for inclusion, such as at Afeteysa Primary and Secondary School in Dire Dawa, Gezahagn (2013) found a continued reliance on traditional teaching methods poorly adapted to the needs of students with hearing impairments. Similarly, Sintayehu

(2015) identified comparable barriers when examining the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of SWHIs.

However, no study has previously examined both teacher and student perceptions toward the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town. Despite findings from other regions, this specific gap in the research remains unaddressed. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining these perceptions. Clearly understanding the perspectives of teachers and students is essential for developing targeted interventions and strategies to foster a more inclusive educational environment at the school and potentially inform broader efforts toward inclusive education in Ethiopia.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The main objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were;

- ✓ To assess the perceptions of teachers towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta.
- ✓ To examine the perceptions of students without hearing impairments regarding their peers' with hearing impairments' inclusion at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta.
- ✓ To explore the perceptions of students with hearing impairments regarding their inclusion in regular classrooms at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta.
- ✓ To assess the strategies employed by teachers to enhance the participation of students with hearing impairments in the teaching-learning process.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta?

2. How do students without hearing impairments perceive the inclusion of their peers with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta?
3. How do students with hearing impairments perceive their inclusion in regular classrooms at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta?
4. What strategies do teachers employ to enhance the participation of students with hearing impairments in the teaching-learning process at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study examines how teachers and students at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta perceive the inclusion of students who have hearing impairments. This study delivers essential value to stakeholders directly associated with the school as well as those in comparable educational environments by fulfilling its specific research objective.

Teachers and students at the school require a clear understanding of their perceptions regarding inclusion in their specific environment. The research results reveal the impact of teacher perceptions on educational methods and classroom interactions, which influence how students with hearing impairments experience inclusion. Professional development strategies and training programs are informed by this understanding, creating supportive environments that facilitate inclusive education.

The study shows specific steps for students with hearing impairments to improve their educational experiences. The research provided insights into student needs which led to inclusive educational strategies and enhanced their academic and social integration. The study's objective and the focus on students' experiences work together to produce meaningful and applicable results.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

The study focused specifically on Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta and included only students who qualified as having hearing impairments. This study examined the inclusion of students with hearing impairments through the perceptions of both teachers and students. The study focused only on a particular level of hearing impairment, allowing it to investigate the problems concerning resources and social interactions related to the inclusion of this group

outside the context of other disabilities or special education needs. Other delimitations regarding the process, which also affected the study's scope, were the researcher's hearing impairment, budgetary issues, and the absence of sign language interpreters. For these reasons, the researcher was limited in collecting data and conversing with participants. This means that the researcher was able to interview only students who spoke or seemed able to understand both spoken and sign language. While it was possible to obtain data in this way, the restrictiveness had a significant impact on participants' ability to communicate, and thus impacted the depth of communication and the richness of the participants' data during interviews and discussions.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms

- **Inclusive Education:** Educating students with disabilities alongside non-disabled students in general classrooms, with adapted teaching methods and resources to ensure full participation.
- **Inclusion:** The concept that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to be taught, respected, and valued as members of their communities or classrooms.
- **Hearing Impairment:** A partial or total inability to hear, which affects a student's ability to communicate and engage in class activities without support.
- **Teachers' Perceptions about the inclusion of students with hearing impairment:** Refers to how teachers see, view, feel, think, or behave toward the inclusion of students with hearing impairments in mainstream schools.
- **Students' Perceptions about the inclusion of students with hearing impairment:** Refers to how students view and interact with their peers who have hearing impairments, focusing on acceptance and involvement in classroom activities.
- **Mainstream Classrooms:** General education classrooms where students with and without disabilities are taught together, with adjustments made to accommodate diverse learners.
- **Challenges:** Obstacles or difficulties encountered by teachers and students in the process of including students with hearing impairments in mainstream classrooms.
- **Support Systems:** Resources and services, such as sign language interpreters or hearing aids that assist students with hearing impairments in accessing education.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This section introduces the basic concepts and definitions related to the topic of the study. It aims to clarify key terms and provide a foundational understanding that supports the subsequent detailed discussion.

2.1.1 The Concept of Hearing Impairment

Hearing loss is defined and categorized in various ways, often using different terminology. Classifications can be based on the affected part of the auditory system, the severity of the loss in decibels (e.g., mild: 26–40 dB, severe: 71-90 dB), or educational impact. The most significant distinction is between profoundly deaf and hard of hearing (Hallahan et al., 2009). The current preferred term, used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) in the United States, is "deaf and hard of hearing." IDEIA defines this as a disability that, with or without amplification, negatively affects a student's ability to use hearing for language development, learning, educational performance, and developmental progress. This definition encompasses permanent or temporary, mild to profound, and unilateral or bilateral hearing loss.

It also provides a wide definition that recognizes that people with hearing loss may use spoken language, sign language or a combination of both and including individuals who experience hearing loss regardless of whether they use hearing aids or cochlear implants.

The IDEIA statute defines deafness in terms of the impact on education and learning rather than medical definitions. It suggests that a person is deaf only if their hearing loss restricts their learning. For instance, students (like the examples above) who have temporary hearing loss, utilizes spoken language, and who experience educational consequences of hearing loss fall under "hard of hearing" special education classification. These students are qualified for special education services that fit their unique needs and are outlined in their IEP which could consist of accommodation, medical treatment, interpreter, and modified instruction. Other common classifications include congenitally deaf (severe loss from birth), adventitiously deaf (loss

occurred after birth), pre-lingual deaf (deaf prior to learning language), and post-lingual deaf (deaf following acquisition). (Hallahan et al., 2009).

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This section outlines the main theoretical perspectives that guide this study. Three primary models of disability, the charity, medical, and social models, are briefly discussed to provide a foundation for analyzing issues related to hearing impairments.

2.2.1 Charity Model of Disability

The charity model of disability views people with disabilities as primarily victims of their own conditions, one that is reliant upon the assistance and support of people in society, mostly because of their own limitations. The charity model emphasizes compassion and philanthropy, which very much implies the person strongly, depends on the goodwill of others to be fully human in their lives. It is very easy (and it is very common) to view people with disabilities as pity points, in Oliver's (1996) language. The charity model can unquestioningly, and subconsciously, reinforce messages about people's incapacity to function and live independently, while also perpetuating negative stereotypes and marginalizing the opportunities available to people with disabilities.

Moreover, the charity model can lead to a loss of agencies for people with disabilities, whereby their wants and needs are dictated by external bodies, rather than included their own voices. Roulstone and Prideaux (2009) refer to a cycle of dependency in the charity model, whereby people with disabilities have not been able to advocate for their rights and, therefore, become stagnant as they remain dehumanized. While charitable acts are often justified as necessary and helpful supports, the charity model does little to change the changing the societal beliefs and practices around inclusion and equality for people with disabilities. Therefore, the charity model undermines the dignity of persons with disabilities and perpetuates a societal structure that fails to recognize their potential and contributions.

2.2.2 Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability attributes the disability to the individual's impairments and limitations, framing it as a medical deficiency in need of intervention or cure. It places authority in the hands of the healthcare professionals who define and govern disability. For this reason, the

model tends to be a narrow one because it does not incorporate the totality of the person's experience. Thomas (2004) stated that a deficit model of disability has implications that [i.e.,] it reduces people to being patients with impairments needing repair, and it is easy to lose sight of the person's social needs and rights. The medical model endorses interventions that may be essentially medical in nature, and it may omit, ignore, or overlook the role of social and environmental factors in shaping disability experiences, so impairing social understanding of what it means to be a disabled individual.

Furthermore, the medical model of disability creates stigma and marginalization because it draws attention to people's differences rather than their abilities. It requires that students with disability pathologies disability through a deficit lens, an approach that results in defining people primarily by their medical condition. While medicine is an important vehicle for intervention for impairments, the model fails to recognize the need for social inclusion or support systems that allow individuals with disabilities to live successful, fulfilling lives in society. In this way, the medical model may perpetuate barriers to inclusion by emphasizing treatment rather than the needed societal changes to enable individuals with disabilities to fully participate in their communities. Thus, the medical model can inadvertently reinforce barriers to inclusion by prioritizing treatment over the necessary societal changes that would allow individuals with disabilities to participate fully in their communities.

2.2.3 Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability is a radical approach in the way that it conceives disability is not so much an individual problem but a socially created phenomenon based on environmental, cultural, and institutional barriers. Disability occurs because of the failure of society to adjust to diversity, and not because of the impairment itself, it is contended. As Barnes (2012) states, the social model necessitates a restructuring of society to eliminate barriers to participation, and in doing so, it promotes equality and inclusion for people with disabilities. By redirecting the locus of attention from the individual to the social world, the social model promotes a more inclusive and equitable understanding of disability that calls for system-level changes to eliminate barriers to participation.

The social model also empowers individuals with disabilities by validating their experiences and allowing self-advocacy. It promotes the idea that persons with disabilities are entitled to full

participation in society and their contributions must be valued. This model, as stated by McCallion and Feder (2007), creates a sense of agency among individuals with disabilities to confront norms in society and fight for rights. By prioritizing accessibility, inclusion, and the necessity of social change, this model provides a framework for envisaging disability as a human rights concern that fosters a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Thus, in this study, the social model of disability will be the prevailing framework through which the study will be examined. Utilizing this model, the study will be concerned with the social structures and attitudes that affect the lives of those with hearing impairments. This line of thinking will inform the analysis, with an emphasis on the need for inclusive practice and the need for systems-level changes in schools. The social model will be the lens whereby the findings of the research will be viewed, emphasizing that the removal of social barriers is pivotal in the facilitation of true inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities.

2.3 Inclusion in Education

In recent years, efforts to provide equitable education for all learners with disabilities have gained momentum, thanks to increasing public consciousness, technological growth, and more inclusive policies (Abebe, 2001). Inclusive education, centered on the principle that every child has the right to learn within the regular school environment, has become a focal point of global discourse. Among the regions receiving special consideration is incorporating SWHIs in regular schools. The incorporation, though, has immense challenges. Among the key issues is the non-reform of general education systems from their rigid curricula to conventional teaching approaches that are unable to accommodate multiple needs (UNESCO, 2005, quoted by Tilahun, 2007). Real inclusion is much more than placing students with disabilities in the regular classroom; it is about changing the culture of the school that is supported by a strong national policy and a detailed action plan. UNESCO (1998, 1999, as cited in Tirussew, 1999) has indicated that some developing countries are showing some promise with more inclusive systems.

In Ethiopia, however, the path is still complicated, prevailing social beliefs tending to be a reflection of misunderstanding and resistance regarding teaching SWHIs (Tirussew, 2005). Such attitudes can complicate policy interventions unless deliberately confronted. Additionally, teachers' preparedness influences inclusive practices significantly. The majority of general education teachers admit to having little preparation on how to adapt their instruction to students with special needs, with factors of

preparation, lack of preparation, and lack of support during class (Etenesh, 2001). These are factors that contribute to varying degrees of inclusion.

2.4 Understanding Perception in Inclusive Education

Perception is an essential psychological process that affects how individuals ascribe meaning and respond to their environment. Scholars provide multiple definitions of perception. Collins Concise Dictionary (2002) provides synonyms that include awareness, understanding, view, opinion, idea, taste, notion, sensation, and conception, making note of the cognitive and affective aspects of perception. WordNet (2003-2008) provides a broader definition, describing perception as "becoming aware of something via the senses." In an educational setting, perception refers to how teachers and students interpret experiences, shape their perceptions, and develop expectations about different aspects of teaching and learning (Gibson, Ivancevich, & Donnelly, 2009). It plays an important role in shaping beliefs, behavior, and responses to situations, including inclusive education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). There are a number of psychological theories delineating the nature of perception and how perception influences actions. The Gestalt Theory of perception proposed that individuals don't just receive information in some passive way from the world around them; individuals actively organize sensory information and interpret it so they can create and represent meaningful patterns (Wagemans et al., 2012). In education, this would suggest that teachers and students will perceive inclusion differently based upon their experiences, knowledge, and expectations. Schema Theory similarly suggests that people make sense of new experiences based upon those existing cognitive frameworks (Anderson, 2018) and seems to suggest that teachers' views and perceptions of students with hearing impairments (SWHI) were produced from their individual experiences, prior training, and understanding of disability and inclusion in education. Additionally, Social Constructivist Theory posits that perception can be viewed as a social construction, which is influenced by the people and environment we are around (Vygotsky, 1978; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). So, this means that both students and teachers have perceptions that are developed through social interactions, classroom situations, and policy structures. Ecological Theory of Perception posits that perception is based on affordances from the environment, i.e., individuals perceive and act based on the affordances and constraints the context provides (Gibson, 1979). For instance, teachers' sense of inclusion may be positive when

they are in a resourced school, but more challenging to come to that conclusion when they are in a less resourced context.

There are many factors that influence how students and teachers perceive the integration of SWHI in mainstream education. Personal experience and exposure to individuals who had hearing impairments are important factors, as teachers and students with previous exposure to people with hearing loss tended to have more favorable perceptions (Smith, 2020). Professional training and development play a role in perception. Teachers who had specialized training in inclusive education are more likely to support the implementation of inclusive practices (Brown, Jones, & Taylor, 2019). Cultural and societal attitudes toward disability can also heavily influence how inclusion will be perceived. Some communities can be more accepting compared to others (Johnson, 2021). Perceptions are influenced by institutional support through policy implementation. Schools with strong administrative backing and clear guidelines, resources, and evidence can produce environments where inclusion is more readily accepted (Florian, 2014).

Within the context of this research, perception refers to a wide range of definitions, combining both cognitive (knowledge-based) and affective (emotion-based) aspects. This research aims to examine how teachers and students at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School perceive the inclusion of SWHI. The research explored whether their perception is influenced by any training, experience, environmental aspect, or problems with the erstwhile system. This research revealed the permissive resources and barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

2.5 The Impact of Hearing Impairments on Academic Achievement of SWHIs

2.5.1 Language Development and Literacy

Language development is a major hurdle that students with hearing impairments face in Ethiopia and many countries. Hearing impairments have considerable negative effects on the acquisition of Amharic and other region languages because the inability to access auditory cues negatively affects vocabulary accumulation, language grammatical construction, reading, and writing development (Hassanzadeh & Tabrizi, 2020). Researchers on inclusive education practices in Addis Ababa, for instance, found lack of support for language skills can be a significant challenge to literacy development (Mekonnen, 2019); as well as the limited availability of resources and teachers trained with sign language has been referenced by researchers as a key

factor to limited use of sign language in classrooms (Getachew, 2021). Access to early intervention services that contribute to language development has been limited in many areas across the country in Ethiopia, which meant many of the learners with hearing impairments entered the school system with considerable language deficits (Zewdie, 2022). Language deficits are troublesome during formal schooling as language deficits impact the academic success of students in school, including potentially negative implications in adaptability to academic success in reading, writing, and social science courses (Abebe, 2018). If a child with a hearing impairment does not receive language development supports, they have an extended risk of not being successful academically, then potentially experience a cascade of long-term negative implications for their educational pathways to success and occupational opportunities (Dawit, 2020).

2.5.2 Communication and Classroom Participation

Communication challenges are a major obstacle to classroom involvement in Ethiopian schools for students with hearing impairments; research shows that many are not only untrained in effective communication with these students but also often intentionally overlook such teaching methods, leading to communication failures, unrealized potential, and stigmatization (Assefa, 2021).

Several studies conducted in Ethiopian school settings have documented the communication gap between teachers and students with hearing impairments, confirming the need for better instruction for teachers and an emphasis on sign language interpreters (Kebede, 2020). Additionally, hearing students lack awareness of their peers with hearing impairments, which can result in social exclusion and bullying to the detriment of their peers, (Mulugeta, 2022). In a challenging learning environment, peer interactions in classroom settings are less than ideal. The gap in productive communication creates a barrier to logical expression, and constructively contributing to classroom discussion leads to resentment and social isolation, which may detract from self-efficacy and student motivation (Tadesse, 2019).

2.5.3 Cognitive and Academic Performance

Cognition consists of processes such as attention, memory, and modulation of processing of items, but these processes can be disrupted with a hearing impairment and may further disrupt academic performance. In an Ethiopian context, previous studies have shown that while students

with hearing impairment were given multi-step instructions and retained information, they were unable to process the information quickly or correctly, including information they were unable to process for an ample time (Biruk, 2021).

Accordingly, the interference with cognitive processes has implications for learning performance across the educational spectrum, even in the case of subjects such as mathematics and science that rely on verbal instruction (Hailu, 2020). Also in comparative study, it is established through studies that students with hearing impairments also show impaired levels of comprehension in terms of grasping abstract concepts, as well as in the ability to solve verbally presented problems (Fekadu, 2023). Finally, the interplay of these cognitive and academic challenges may culminate in poor academic achievement, grade retention, and lower educational attainment overall (Mesfin, 2022). Thus, students with hearing impairments must receive educational supports that include appropriate access to assistive technology, specialized instruction, and inclusive learning opportunities (Tamiru, 2021).

2.6 The Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments in Regular Classrooms

2.6.1 Benefits of Inclusion

There are several social and academic benefits of including students with disabilities in typical schools in Ethiopia. One of the main advantages of inclusion is that it supports social interaction among students with different abilities, it creates a feeling of belonging and community. According to Tesfaye (2020), inclusive education encourages students with disabilities to engage with other students, resulting in the reduction of barriers and stigmatization around disabilities. Moreover, as Abebe (2019) points out, disabled students in general education classes are more likely to have enhanced social skills compared to their peers in separate environments. This interaction not only enhances the lives of students with disabilities but also promotes understanding and compassion among all the students.

Scholarship, in terms of inclusion, can lead to enhanced student learning for students with disabilities (Alemayehu 2021) discovered that when students with disabilities are placed in the general education setting, they tend to do better academically compared to students taught in separate environments. Access to high-quality teaching and various approaches to teaching in inclusive classrooms can initiate brain growth and improvement in academic performance. Additionally, inclusive education results in the adoption of differentiated teaching practices by

educators, which will benefit all learners by addressing various styles and learning needs (Biruk, 2022). This not only benefits students with disabilities but also improves the learning experience of their non-disabled peers.

Inclusivity prepares every student with the ability to reside in a multicultural world. In Ethiopia, which are culturally diverse, students will engage with individuals with various capacities and backgrounds in their working and personal lives. Through shared learning at an early stage, students gain valuable life skills such as cooperation, communication, and problem-solving (Mulugeta, 2020). These are highly critical skills for achievement in an inclusive and multicultural society. Therefore, not only does inclusive education assist students with disabilities both academically and socially, but it also gives all students the ability to cope with future interactions in multicultural environments.

Finally, inclusive education supports the idea of equity and access in education. The principle of providing all students, regardless of their abilities, the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment aligns with the goals of social justice in education (EMoE, 2017). Legislative policies in Ethiopia also emphasize the inclusion aspect of ensuring that students who are disabled are provided with appropriate educational services within general education environments. This commitment to inclusivity emphasizes the need for diversity in education and has supporting evidence that every student deserves a proper education (Alemayehu, 2021).

2.6.2 Challenges to Inclusion

While participation in inclusive education has benefits, it can be hampered by implementation concerns and challenges. One major obstacle to inclusive education in Ethiopia is teachers' lack of specialized training in special education and intervention strategies or inclusive education (Abebe, 2019). Many teachers express lack of preparedness to support all of the diverse learners in the inclusive settings they serve. When a teacher feels unprepared to account for the wide range of abilities in an inclusive setting, they often struggle and lose confidence in their teaching abilities. This lack of preparedness can result in the inability to provide adequate support to diverse learners, which damages that learner's academic abilities and social development. Additionally, teachers often do not have access to targeted professional learning where they are taught how to adapt and differentiate instruction based on their students' particular needs (Biruk, 2022).

Teachers also face challenges related to managing students in classrooms with multiple students across the ability spectrum. When teachers are planning lessons and managing classrooms in inclusive settings, they have to take into account the various abilities and disability labels for each of their learners (Tadesse, 2021). Teachers struggle to manage their lessons so that they engage all learners while intentionally distinguishing individual learners' needs. When some students have more need for support than others in this regard, inclusive education is sometimes disintegrated and can lead to chaos in a classroom that does not support or promote learning for all learners. Along with strategies for classroom management, there is a need for appropriate assistance and supports for teachers in inclusive educational settings.

A further complication regards the social isolation of students with disabilities. Even in inclusive classrooms, students may find themselves excluded from peer interactions, due to their peers' lack of understanding and acceptance of disabilities (Alemayehu, 2021). Social isolation has a negative effect on students' self-esteem and willingness to participate in a classroom. For this reason, all schools must introduce awareness programs to all students about disability and instill acceptance and inclusion (Mulugeta, 2020).

The final challenge that successful inclusion faces in schools is resource allocation. Due to fund shortages, many schools in Ethiopia will not be able to provide accommodations, assistive technology and additional support staff needed by the students and schools (Tesfaye, 2020). A lack of sufficient resources will severely limit the potential of inclusive practice and it often leaves students with disabilities and the teachers who support them, to struggle without adequate support. Accordingly, seeking to alleviate differences in resources is fundamental to inclusion becoming understood as a 'real' concept in schools rather than a theory (Tadesse, 2021).

2.6.3 Strategies for Successful Inclusion

There are many important strategies that teachers can use to support the success of inclusive education efforts in Ethiopia. The most important is differentiated instruction. By differentiating instruction, teachers can prepare lessons that accommodate and address the varied needs of all students (Biruk, 2022). The strategy is important not only for students with disabilities, but it benefits all students by engaging all learners, while also stretching them. Teachers may use flexible groupings, multiple instructional approaches, and multiple means of assessment for student differentiation in the inclusive classroom (Tesfaye, 2020).

Another important strategy to create inclusive practice is co-teaching strategies. Including general education and special education teachers together will give students with disabilities access to expert knowledge in the general education classroom (Alemayehu, 2021). It opens the door for future cooperation because it allows both teachers to share effective teaching practices, while allowing for individual interventions. It has been found in research that the co-teaching model can lead to positive academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Mulugeta, 2020). So, establishing co-teaching and teamwork among teachers is an essential component for the successful implementation of inclusive practices.

The first factor, creating an environment, is in addition to teaching practices. Building a culture based on diversity and respect is a critical step to foster positive relationships with students (Abebe, 2019). Teachers can build an environment by taking on social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs not only invest in how to build empathy, empathy, understanding, and conflict resolution skills in students but also help ameliorate the learning environment for all students (Tadesse, 2021).

Finally, families contribute to the educational process as a catalyst for inclusive practices. Families and caregivers have a priceless history of their child's attributes, strengths, and support requirements, which may support improved home-school communication (Biruk, 2022). To be a partner in education, families need to become engaged in schools to be involved in decision-making and encouraged to participate in school life. With successful interactions with families, teachers can build an environment for all students that will provide a greater sense of inclusion (Alemayehu, 2021).

2.6.4 Legal and Policy Framework

The legal and policy framework on the inclusive education of students with disabilities in Ethiopia is important in shaping education practice. The Education and Training Policy emphasizes the need for inclusive education, which enforces an obligation to provide students with disabilities with access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (EMoE, 2017). Legislation effectively holds schools to provide the necessary support and accommodations to ensure inclusion. Awareness of such policies enables teachers to support inclusive practices at their school and enables students with disabilities to receive the services and accommodations needed to thrive in their educational context (Mulugeta, 2020).

In addition, when instituting policies of this nature, ongoing support and training by educators is required. Professional development programs should provide the required professional knowledge and competencies of educators to implement inclusive practices. Professional development in differentiated instruction, co-teaching, and a myriad of classroom management techniques more suitable for an inclusive classroom, should be a part of the professional development program (Tadesse, 2021). If schools cared enough about teacher preparation to prepare their teachers to implement inclusive practices, then this could significantly improve their alignment to practice with legislation and improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. Alignment to inclusive education is not exclusively dictated by federal laws

Policies at the state and local level are also situated within systems and bureaucracy, which influence how legislation is implemented into practice. States may have created both guidelines and funding in some form, which may be used in support of inclusive practices; however, it is at the discretion of the state education policy to what extent they are committed to, or value inclusive practices (Alemayehu, 2021). Schools navigate a complex governance system, linked to policies and bureaucracy, while also advocating for assistance and resources to support and enhance their inclusive practices. Educators, administrators, and policy experts all have a stake in how inclusive education is implemented, and a collaborative approach may help ensure the disconnection between the policy and influential processes is bridged (Biruk, 2022).

Finally, the advocacy of families and other community organizations can greatly serve to advance the cause of inclusive education. Families of students with disabilities can often serve as exemplary advocates for their children's rights and can impact policy decisions at both the local and national levels (Tesfaye, 2020). Through discussions around inclusive education, schools can have some understanding of the needs and concerns faced by students with disabilities. Working collaboratively with families would, in principle, result in more effective policies and practices that promote inclusion and address the unique needs of learners (Mulugeta, 2020).

2.7 Perceptions of Teachers on the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments

2.7.1 Overview of Teachers' Role in Inclusion

Every regular education teacher is unique in their perceptions about including students with hearing impairments and integrated education. Ultimately, the perceptions teachers hold play a

significant role in their classroom practices and the success of inclusive education. Forlin (2010) suggested that teachers' beliefs regarding inclusion directly influence their teaching styles, the engagement of students, and the classroom climate. Teachers who hold positive perceptions of inclusion, supported by sufficient knowledge or training, are more likely to create flexible and inclusive classrooms that benefit all learners, including students with hearing impairment.

On the contrary, negative perceptions of inclusion can pose significant barriers to the education of children with disabilities. Fentaw (2019) discusses that common views and misunderstandings surrounding inclusive education are major obstacles to the educational inclusion of students with hearing impairment. Like societal perceptions, the negative impressions of inclusion frequently arise from a lack of knowledge and awareness of students with hearing impairments needs and potential. Teachers' resistant views may also hinder their receptivity and ability to engage with inclusive practices. If teachers are inadequately prepared, it can exacerbate a negative image. According to Avramidis and Norwich (2002), teachers who are not adequately prepared with regard to inclusive education are less likely to adopt an inclusive learning environment. This situation can be particularly serious when new teachers enter schools with no induction training, or professional development on how to work with students with disabilities and may overlook students with hearing impairments, only considering their hearing student peers.

In addressing these limitations, it is useful to have special education in-service courses available for all teachers in order to limit negative perceptions, and develop a positive understanding of students with hearing impairments. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2002), indicates that once teachers engage in inclusive practice, they are creating opportunities for quality learning for all students, thus increasing participation in the classroom and their wider school communities. Perception is a vital component of human interaction and shapes how people react to events, make decisions, and interact with others (Vaughan & Hogg, 2002). Similarly, Simi (2008) observes how people's perceptions inform people's thoughts, beliefs, views and actions which are manifested positively or negatively. In relation to the inclusion of students with hearing impairments, teachers' perceptions are crucial to supporting inclusive education policy implementation in mainstream schools (Frost, 2002).

2.7.2 Challenges for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

While teachers represent the most important factor in inclusive education, they still face numerous challenges that might influence their participation in including students with hearing impairments. In Ethiopia, Tirussew (2005) identified several challenges for teachers, including lack of access to professional development opportunities, provision of adequate instructional materials, and lack of knowledge or ability to communicate effectively using Ethiopian Sign Language as challenges to teachers' communication with students with hearing impairments which negatively affect the quality of inclusion. Schwartz (2018) identifies other aspects of education, such as inflexible systems, large class sizes, and limited human and material resources can result in teachers having little pedagogical freedom regarding how to use the curriculum to facilitate the learning for all students, including those with disabilities. Schwartz (2018) claims, these limitations can be complicated how teachers can adapt the curriculum and their ability to ensure students with hearing impairments fully participate in lessons.

One of the challenges of the implementation of inclusive education is working with the diverse needs of all students, whether they have disabilities or not (Tirussew, 2005). Inclusion requires that schools comprehend and respond to diverse needs within schools by addressing different learning styles, ensuring quality education, and using appropriate teaching style strategies along with quality resources and effective partnerships with the community (UNESCO, 1994). However, studies show that teachers are not adequately supported and prepared for successful inclusive education practices. Most higher educational institutions that enroll in regular teacher education programs do not provide opportunities for teacher training programs to incorporate special adaptations related to students with hearing impairments or modify curricula to appropriately meet their needs. Etenesh (2000) also noted that the lack of appropriate facilities and resources, including studies of locally produced teacher learning materials, significant practice books, and visual education, is a further barrier to providing effective inclusion in schools.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education called for a systematic approach to providing appropriate educational services for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The challenges with inclusive education involve issues related to teacher training, resource provision, and financial support, but teacher perceptions may be the most

substantial barrier to success. Negative teacher perceptions typically stem from a lack of resources and training, leading them to perceive including students with hearing impairments as too difficult or impossible. To strengthen inclusive education for all students with disabilities, challenges such as negative teacher perceptions must be addressed through more targeted training, better resources, and more positive perceptions regarding inclusion.

2.7.3 The Impact of Teacher Perceptions on the Inclusion of SWHI

Inclusion of students with hearing impairments into mainstream classrooms could be strongly affected by the teacher's perceptions. Research has indicated that teachers with prepared perceptions of inclusion in general teachers and inclusion of students with disabilities use appropriate instruction that considers students' needs. For example, Kebede (2022) explains that when teachers have a positive perception of the capacity of students with hearing impairments, this often leads them to apply inclusive practices, and, as a result, educational outcomes for the students improve. These positive perceptions also provide more favorable opportunities for all students to work in a successful learning environment.

Despite these positive perceptions about inclusion, many teachers suggest that they feel unprepared to meet the distinct needs of SWHIs. Fekadu (2021) found that educators suggest that they commit to inclusion; however, they are not trained enough in special education practices regarding the unique needs of students who are hard of hearing. Teacher inadequacy concerning training opportunities related to various types of inclusion will hinder their ability to use the best practices for inclusion, which will ultimately affect the academic learning and social growth of students with hearing impairments.

Additionally, teacher perceptions have a large influence on social relations and interactions in the classroom. According to Melaku (2023), if teachers perceive students with hearing impairments as competent and worthy of being included, positive peer interactions are more likely to occur.

Conversely, negative perceptions can develop lower expectations for students, and increase the likelihood of isolation, and few academic opportunities. Therefore, teacher perceptions need to be considered if we want to develop inclusive schooling practices which support all learners, in particular students with hearing impairments, through professional development and service support for teachers

2.8 Students' Perception of the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment

Researchers have found that hearing people often have negative perceptions and stereotypical views about deaf people that can create feelings of discomfort for students with hearing impairments wanting to fully engage in every school activity but feel self-conscious around their hearing peers. Rejection by hearing from peers can exacerbate social and academic difficulties for these students. Furthermore, some institutions lack the necessary assistive technologies to meet the individual needs of students with hearing impairments (Mekonnen et al., 2016).

Social interaction is crucial for well-being, and isolation can have significant negative impacts. Hearing impairment learners may experience behavioral challenges within their families and peer groups. Communication barriers often exist between hearing and students with hearing impairments due to differing communication methods. While hearing learners typically use verbal language, hearing impairment learners rely on sign language, creating a significant obstacle to mutual understanding (Hankins, 2015).

This study explores hearing students' perceptions of socializing with their hearing impairments. Communication difficulties are common between both groups of students. While some students with hearing impairments enjoy interacting with hearing peers, others prefer the company of other individuals with hearing impairments, feeling more comfortable in those interactions, particularly when working on group projects. Regular students may find it challenging to form groups with hearing impairment students due to communication barriers. However, students without hearing impairments who have learned sign language can communicate more easily, using verbal and non-verbal communication (Netten et al., 2015).

Friendships are vital for social interaction and building positive self-esteem in students with hearing impairments. Studies suggest that students with hearing impairments may perform less well in mixed groups (hearing and with hearing impairments) compared to hearing students. Rejection by hearing peers can contribute to anxiety, isolation, and low self-concept in students with hearing impairments (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013).

2.9 Policy and Legal Framework on Inclusive Education

Inclusive education for students with a disability, such as hearing impairment, is informed by a variety of international and national legal and policy instruments. These instruments play a

crucial role in enabling the integration of these students into the mainstream learning setup and ensuring they are provided with sufficient support.

Globally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) is a foundational piece of legislation. Article 24 of the convention highlights the right of persons with disabilities to enjoy the right to inclusive and quality education on equal terms with others. It supports the development of education systems that are responsive to the needs of various learners, such as learners with hearing impairments in accordance with worldwide trends of inclusive learning environments.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) also supports the idea of inclusion as it urges countries to have inclusive education systems for everyone. The statement supports the use of school systems and practices for all learners and asserts that inclusion should be the rule and not the exception.

At the national level, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) establishes the policy within which inclusive education is implemented through the call for all children, regardless of ability, to enjoy access to education. Such a commitment was later elaborated on in the Special Needs Education Strategy (2006), which provides guidelines for the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. In spite of these facilitating policies, their provision is still hampered by insufficient resources, insufficient training of teachers, and low levels of awareness among education personnel of inclusive strategies.

Despite the presence of such policies, there remains a gap between policy and practice in their intention and subsequent implementation. The perceptions of teachers towards inclusion are most effective in determining whether the practices are executed or not. Teachers who have positive perceptions towards inclusive practice are more likely to execute them, while negative perceptions will be a barrier towards full inclusion of SWHIs. It is thus imperative to investigate teachers' perceptions towards inclusion in a bid to bridge the policy practice gap.

2.10 Empirical Research on the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment

Research shows that teacher perception is key to classroom practices and creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers who have positive perceptions of inclusion (i.e. believe in all students and equitable education) are more likely to adapt their teaching, provide individual

support and create a sense of belonging for students with hearing impairment (e.g. Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers with negative perceptions (often due to lack of training, insufficient resources or limited experience with students with hearing impairment) struggle to meet the diverse learning and social needs of their students (e.g. Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008). These negative perceptions can manifest in lower expectations, limited opportunities to participate and no accommodation, and hinder the progress and well-being of SWHL.

The study highlights the need for ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their understanding of hearing impairment, develop communication strategies (including sign language) and inclusive pedagogy. Research shows that well designed professional development can change teacher perception and equip them with the skills and knowledge to create inclusive classrooms (e.g. Florian, 2014). Such programs should address common misconceptions about hearing impairment, provide practical strategies for adapting curriculum and instruction and opportunities for teachers to work with specialists and learn from experienced educators. Ongoing support and mentoring is also essential for teachers to translate their learning into classroom practice and address the unique challenges that arise in inclusive settings.

Students also play a big role in social integration and academic success of students with hearing impairment. Research has shown how hearing students perceive their classmates with hearing impairment and found a range of perceptions from acceptance and empathy to misconceptions, stereotypes and social distancing (e.g., Kamps et al., 2001). Positive interactions and opportunities for communication between hearing, and students with hearing impairments can break down understanding, challenge preconceived notions and social barriers. But communication difficulties, lack of awareness about hearing impairment and societal biases can lead to social isolation, exclusion and even bullying. A school culture that values diversity, promotes empathy and celebrates individual differences is key to acceptance and belonging for all students.

In addition to teacher and student perceptions, the broader school context including administrative support, resource availability and school wide policies also impact inclusion. Supportive school leadership is crucial in creating a vision for inclusion, allocating resources effectively and providing ongoing support for teachers and students. Adequate resources such as

assistive listening devices, accessible learning materials and qualified interpreters or teachers of the deaf are essential in meeting the needs of students with hearing impairment. School wide policies that promote inclusion, address bullying and discrimination and encourage positive social interactions are key to creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all students.

At the same time, analyzing teachers' and students' perceptions could provide a more comprehensive picture of the aspects they can regard as challenging or positive in the context of inclusion. Specifically, educators would focus on the teaching strategies and classroom discipline, and learners refer to the classroom behavior and peer relationships. Research that combines these perceptions and viewpoints may be beneficial for the development of the appropriate interventions and strategies to enhance the levels and quality of effective inclusion. For example, publication about whether teacher training programs can help address student misunderstanding of hearing impairment or publication about the impact of collaborative learning activities on the interaction between hearing and hearing-impaired students can be utilized to discuss the principles of evidence-based practice and develop a truly inclusive educational setting.

Lastly, knowledge about teachers' and students' attitude is necessary to build schools where all children may learn, develop and flourish independently. Schools can create environments where every student can reach their full potential by tackling issues linked to how people view things and building a culture that accepts and understands everyone. This approach helps make schools more welcoming for all. To come up with strategies that work well and fit the local culture for including students who have trouble hearing, we need more studies that look at what's happening in Ethiopian schools and communities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology, specifically utilizing a case study research design, to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study's primary objective is to gain deep and nuanced insights into the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of participants. The case study design is particularly well-suited for this research as it allows for an in-depth, multifaceted exploration of a complex social issue within a specific, real-life "bounded system." In this research, the bounded case is Mulugeta Gadile Primary School.

The selection of a case study design was critical for achieving the research objectives, as it facilitates the collection of rich, detailed data from multiple sources, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. By examining the phenomenon of inclusion within the particular context of a single school, this design enables a holistic understanding of how the perceptions of teachers and students are formed and how they influence educational practices. This approach is essential for capturing the complexity of the participants' experiences and perceptions, thereby developing extensive knowledge of inclusive education in a real-world setting, as recommended by Creswell (2022).

3.2 Research Location

The researcher chose Mulugeta Gadile Primary School. The school is situated in the Mogle 01 district of Sebeta Sub-city, Shager City Administration. It is acknowledged as one of the main schools tackling inclusive education issues in the Sebeta Sub-city Administration. The school has been referenced in research examining the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of Students with hearing impairments.

3.3 Population of the study

The research examined the population at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School, which contained the necessary stakeholders for understanding inclusion perceptions. A total of three directors made up the population, consisting of two men and one female. The implementation of inclusive

practices relied heavily on 60 teachers who including 24 men and 36 female. The school enrolled a student population of 2,954, comprising 1,130 males and 1,824 females. The population was made up of 24 students with hearing impairments (14 males; 10 females). The diversity of the student population supports the study of the success of the inclusion of students with hearing impairments

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

For this research, purposive sampling was utilized as the primary sampling approach through which the researcher managed to select participants who had valuable and concurrent experiences necessary for a deep understanding of the phenomenon in question. Purposive sampling is a stronger sampling method utilized in qualitative research because it aims to study challenging issues rather than generalizing on a large basis (Palinkas et al., 2015). Besides, the strategy was flexible in the sense that it allowed the researcher to change the sample as the research progressed and upon the emergence of new themes and understandings. Participants in this study were selected based on some criteria to maintain relevance and depth of insights.

The research involved ten regular teachers, four males and six females. They were selected on the criteria of a minimum of ten years of teaching experience at the school, direct interaction with students with hearing impairments, and expertise in inclusive education. They needed to be represented fully in the analysis of the implementation of inclusive education and the support given to students with hearing impairments (SWHI) within the education system.

The study also included fifteen students without hearing impairments (seven males and eight females). These students have received their education alongside peers with hearing impairments for many years. Their experiences and viewpoints illuminated peer interactions and the social dynamics present in the inclusive classroom setting. In addition, eight students with hearing impairments (five males, three females) participated in this study. To ensure diversity, these students had different genders, ages, and levels of academic achievement. The participation agreement was a voluntary requirement for them. Their voice was instrumental in bringing to light the real experiences of students with hearing impairments in regular classrooms.

The study sought to gather varied views about practices of inclusive education in the selection of regular teachers, students without hearing impairments, and Students with hearing impairments.

The method ensured that findings were both reliable and valid, with emphasis on depth rather than breadth in data gathering. In the end, the study shed light on the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of SWHIs at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

In order to collect qualitative data on the perception of the teachers and students towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town, this research used observation, interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), and document analysis as data collection tools.

3.5.1 Observation

The researcher employed observation tools as a primary data collection instrument, specifically using a non-participant observation approach. An observation checklist was used to guide the observation of classroom practices and interactions in inclusive classes. This observation focused on the interaction between students and how teachers adjusted their communication methods and engaged with each student individually. The observation aligned with the specific objectives of the study by assessing teachers' perceptions regarding the inclusion of SWHIs and investigating interactions among students with and without hearing impairments. The checklist, which is attached in (Appendix V), also recorded the teacher strategies employed to promote the participation of students with hearing impairments. By obtaining these objectives, observation-enhanced data validity was achieved and gave a general picture of the process in inclusive classrooms, creating a better understanding of the perceptions present within these environments (Creswell, 2022).

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to allow flexibility in the questioning process while ensuring that all relevant areas were adequately addressed. This approach combined pre-determined questions with opportunities for follow-up based on participants' responses. The interviews focused on key themes related to the study's specific objectives and provided insights into the perceptions of teachers, students with hearing impairments, and their peers. Out of the ten teachers involved in the study, only four participated in the interviews. This selection was based on the participants' direct experience in teaching students with hearing

impairments in inclusive classrooms, which was considered essential for providing relevant insights.

Interview questions were designed to align with the study's objectives. First, they aimed to explore teachers' perceptions about including students with hearing impairments and how they adapt their instructional strategies. Second, they examined the perceptions of students without hearing impairments toward the inclusion of students with hearing impairments (SWHI). Finally, students with hearing impairments were asked about their classroom experiences and the extent to which they felt included in the learning process. The development of the interview guide was informed by a careful review of existing literature to ensure that the questions were grounded in prior research and sensitive to the context. This methodological practice helped improve the overall quality of the data collection process by enabling deeper exploration of the complex issues under investigation. As noted by Cohen and Manion (2000), interviews are conducted for various purposes, including gaining insights into people's knowledge, experiences, and perceptions.

3.5.3 Focused Group Discussion

To effectively examine the context of inclusive education dynamics within classrooms from multiple stakeholder perspectives, the researcher conducted two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The first FGD involved six general education teachers who taught students with hearing impairments. This discussion aimed to explore their teaching strategies, perceived challenges, and the support systems available in facilitating inclusive education. Particular attention was given to their training in sign language and the presence or absence of interpreters in classrooms.

The second FGD included four students without hearing impairments from inclusive classrooms. This group was selected to explore peer relationships, social interactions, and their perceptions of the academic participation and challenges faced by students with hearing impairments. Students with hearing impairments (SWHI) were not included in FGDs because not all of them had equal proficiency in using sign language, which could limit their ability to express their ideas equitably during group discussions. There was also a possibility that their voices might be overlooked or misrepresented due to the nature of fast-paced group interaction. To ensure a more inclusive and comfortable space for them to express their individual experiences, SWHI were engaged through

one-on-one interviews instead. Both FGDs were mixed-gender to reflect classroom diversity and ensure a range of perspectives. The sessions were conducted using semi-structured guiding questions, allowing for open-ended responses and in-depth discussion. Each discussion lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

3.5.4 Document analysis

Document analysis involved assessing a range of documents that related to inclusion at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School. This could include policies and school documents that support the guidelines for inclusion. This also looked at curriculum documents to see how inclusion and special education were incorporated into teaching practices. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were examined, particularly for students with hearing impairments, to see what adjustments and changes were made so that students could be integrated into their educational needs. Minutes from staff meetings and committees were reviewed to see if discussions and decisions on inclusion were made. Reports of assessments were looked at to determine how well the students with hearing impairments were performing academically and how they progressed.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed a clear and structured approach. The researcher began by preparing a range of data collection tools, including interview guides, focus group questions, and observation checklists. The tools were translated into Afan Oromo, the vernacular language of the student participants, to ensure comprehension and comfort. To facilitate effective communication with students with hearing impairments, a qualified sign language interpreter from the special needs unit was engaged. The interpreter assisted during interviews and group discussions, ensuring that students could fully participate in the discussions. All data were collected personally by the researcher, allowing close engagement with the context and participants. This process ensured that data collection was consistent, ethical, and accessible to all participants.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to accurately and appropriately describe and relate the data that had been collected. To answer the research questions and achieve the objectives, a

qualitative data analysis method was used. The data collected through interviews, written questions, focus group discussions, and document explanations was qualitatively analyzed in a narrative format. The final outcome of the analysis was to present the data in the form of main and sub-themes. This means that the data collected from various sources and instruments was coded, organized, and analyzed using a narrative description method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data.

The researcher systematically organized the data based on the research questions in a logical order and categorized it into themes or key concepts as described by the respondents. To categorize the data, the researcher employed a coding method, where each data unit was classified under the concept it represented. The coding was done manually. Thus, information from personal interviews, key informants, written questions, and focus group discussions was systematically analyzed. To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including prolonged engagement with the data, member checking with participants to validate interpretations, peer debriefing with colleagues, and maintaining a detailed audit trail of the coding and analysis process. Additionally, triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines were presented to the researcher in the investigations to promote the integrity, respectful engagement, and welfare of all participants. All participants, including students and teachers, provided informed consent that was relevant to the study. Participants indicated an understanding of the investigation, their role, and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Anonymous participant identification is guaranteed through confidentiality through anonymization and the secure storage of all data to prevent sensitive data from being harmed. Secondly, the researcher made sure the problem of participation for students with hearing impairments was made easy through reasonable alternative participation arrangements, such as having the provision of sign language interpreters. Ethical compliance reflects an ethical research focus on working with the highest respect for all participants. Ensuring participation, involvement, and ethical practice can eventually enhance the validity and reliability of the results from the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, focus-group discussions, and document analysis conducted at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School. The analysis examined the major themes and patterns from the observations and descriptions of teachers' and students' perceptions of the inclusion of students with hearing impairments according to the study's research questions. The findings are thematically organized and analyzed to provide further clarity on inclusion as defined by the participants of this study.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic data are significantly useful for understanding the findings, and explicitly linking these data with thematic findings provides richer insights into teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusion.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Regular Teachers

No.	Pseudonyms	Sex	Age	Qualifications	Work experience	Current position
1	RET 1	M	34	Degree	11	Teacher
2	RET 2	F	32	Degree	10	Teacher
3	RET 3	M	35	Degree	12	Teacher
4	RET 4	M	42	Degree	21	Teacher
5	RET 5	M	48	Degree	28	Teacher
6	RET 6	F	46	Diploma	24	Teacher
7	RET 7	F	45	Diploma	25	Teacher
8	RET 8	F	41	Diploma	20	Teacher
9	RET 9	F	52	Diploma	29	Teacher
10	RET 10	F	50	Degree	30	Teacher

Key: RET⇒ Regular Education Teacher

As indicated in Table 1, the study involved a total of 10 regular education teachers (RET 1 to RET 10) with previous work experience of between 10 and 30 years, demonstrating a wealth of professional experience. However, while most participants (6 out of 10) had degrees, four participants had diplomas. Crucially, only three participants obtained formal training in special needs education, which, despite their substantial experience, may impact their understanding and implementation of inclusive practices. This lack of specialized training is a critical systemic issue that will be explored further in the thematic analysis.

Table2.

Demographic Characteristics of Students with Hearing Impairments

Name	Sex	Age	Grade Level	Period of Hearing Impairment	Degree of Hearing Impairment	Educational Placement	Parental Education Level
SWHI 1	F	14	4	Since Birth	Profound	Inclusive Classroom	Grade 8
SWHI 2	F	16	7	Early Childhood	Sever	Inclusive Classroom	No Formal Education
SWHI 3	M	14	5	Since Birth	Profound	Inclusive Classroom	Grade 6
SWHI 4	M	13	5	Early Childhood	Sever	Inclusive Classroom	No Formal Education
SWHI 5	M	18	8	Since Birth	Profound	Inclusive Classroom	No Formal Education
SWHI 6	M	15	4	Since Birth	Profound	Inclusive Classroom	Grade 4
SWHI 7	M	15	6	Early Childhood	Sever	Inclusive Classroom	No Formal Education
SWHI 8	F	19	8	Since Birth	Profound	Inclusive Classroom	Grade 8

Key: ⇒ **SWHI** (Students with Hearing Impairment).

As illustrated in Table 2, eight students with hearing impairments (SWHI 1 to SWHI 8) participated in the study. The SWHI's ages ranged from 13 to 19 years old, and they were in grades 4-8. Most of the participants had hearing impairment either from birth or from a young age. The severity ranged from severe to profound. The majority of the students (5 out of 8) came from families with no formal education, suggesting that they may have lacked academic and emotional support at home outside the classrooms.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of Students without Hearing Impairment

No.	Code Name of the participants	Sex	Age	Grade
1	HS1	F	16	8
2	HS 2	F	15	8
3	HS 3	M	15	8
4	HS 4	M	17	8
5	HS 5	M	17	7
6	HS 6	F	14	7
7	HS 7	F	15	7
8	HS 8	M	13	6
9	HS 9	F	13	6
10	HS 10	F	14	6
11	HS 11	M	12	5
12	HS 12	M	12	5
13	HS 13	F	13	5
14	HS 14	F	11	4
15	HS 15	M	10	4

Key: ⇒ HS (Hearing Students)

As shown in Table 3, there were fifteen hearing students involved in the study (HS 1 to HS 15), who were selected from grades 4 to 8 of both sexes, and who had a variety of opinions and experiences on inclusive education.

4.2 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Inclusion

The following findings are from a qualitative analysis of data from interviews and focus group interviews. Participants' comments were systematically grouped and organized to identify themes relevant to the participants' views and perceptions of inclusion (Creswell, 2012). An analysis of teachers' and students' perceptions on the inclusion of students with hearing impairment resulted in three associated themes: teachers "Celebrating" awareness and obstacles regarding inclusion, students with hearing impairment "sensing" acceptance and exclusion, and hearing students experiencing empathy and communication gaps.

These three themes directly address the research questions by grouping and organizing the different perspectives and experiences of participants. The teachers' theme illustrates awareness of perceptions of inclusion but also presents the actual problems they face, such as having no communication or sign language competency, training or resources available to be able to provide opportunities for students with hearing impairment. The theme of students with hearing impairments demonstrates the incongruity between physically integrating into the classrooms and actually socially and academically integrating into learning environments; they also illustrate these inconsistencies are amplified by communication challenges and limitations in participation. Importantly, they also demonstrate their resilience and their own strategies to deal with challenges.

The last theme on hearing students points out their positive perceptions and predisposition for their peers with hearing impairments while identifying the communication barriers stopping deeper connections. Each of these themes interconnects; as a communication barrier that affected, impacted, and influenced all participant groups and the overall dynamics of inclusion. The following subsections will describe each theme in detail, supported by data evidence.

4.2.1 Teachers' Perception of Inclusion of Students Hearing Impairments

This section presents the perceptions of general education teachers towards students with hearing impairments from in-depth interviews. Four teachers from the study population were involved in

participating. The outcomes from the interviews were handled qualitatively with a focus on the emergent themes as revealed in the teachers' accounts regarding the inclusion of SWHIs. The responses of the teachers captured a number of the most significant assumptions towards inclusion of students with hearing impairments and their challenges within the general education setting:

One teacher (RET1) presumed that the major challenges of students with hearing impairments directly result from the hearing impairments. While noting potential poorer academic performance, this teacher presumed such students are still capable of participating in school life.

RET1 reported:

"Generally, when we observe students with hearing impairments, it seems they have no problems apart from being deaf. Although they may do less, they can join them in most tasks."

Another teacher (RET2) noted the significant difficulty that students with hearing impairments experience in comprehending verbal material. This was seen as the largest barrier to the acquisition of verbal information and full integration in class lessons.

RET2 indicated:

"The greatest challenge for SWHIs is their struggle to comprehend verbal information, which makes it difficult for them to internalize verbal knowledge. Consequently, they are unable to keep up with lessons in the same manner as hearing students and tend to find it difficult to understand verbal communications."

Two of the teachers (RET3 and RET4) specifically mentioned the lack of sign language proficiency among general education teachers as one of the main communication challenges. This communication challenge was noted to negatively affect the academic performance and general understanding of students with hearing impairments.

RET3 noted:

"Our incapability to work sign language makes it difficult for them to understand the lessons obtained, and therefore their performance is below average compared to other students. This means they have serious issues in school."

RET4 added:

"It's apparent that students with hearing impairments are not able to communicate with normal instructors because we have not been trained or undergone workshops on sign language, and therefore it is very challenging to understand such students."

Interviewed teachers' observations mirror a common perception of challenges that the SWHIs go through in integrated learning settings. The primary challenge is the communication issue arising from the fact that the students cannot understand spoken language completely and because teachers do not possess sign language skills. Though the one teacher suggested that difficulties are mainly limited to hearing issues, the other responses highlight the extensive implications these communication issues have for learning and academic engagement. These initial reactions point to the need for further investigation of the types of difficulties such students face and the support required for their inclusion.

4.2.2 Students with Hearing Impairments Perceptions of Inclusion

Students with hearing impairments (SWHI) perceived several potential benefits of inclusive education, most significantly the opportunity to interact with hearing students and exercise their rights on a particular basis.

SWHI1 said:

"Inclusive education has its own advantages for us and our hearing peers as well. Some hearing pupils are learning sign language and can communicate with us."

However, despite the awareness of such benefits, concerns were raised regarding full incorporation of pupils with hearing impairments by both teachers and fellow students. Students with hearing impairments defined that their inclusion remained on the surface due to limited contact and misunderstanding within normal classrooms.

SWHI2 also clarified:

"We just get taken along and incorporated in the overall class. The only ones we know and had been our teachers, people who taught us before in the special classroom setting."

SWHI2 also contributed:

"We typically get excluded from group work because it's hard to keep up with the conversation, and we wish more of our classmates better understood our challenges."

Such perceptions reflect that even with the realization of the value of inclusion by students with hearing impairments, they are still far from overcoming significant obstacles in being active participants in the classroom. With communication barriers and lack of understanding by teachers and peers, they cannot effectively engage in the learning process. These observations reflect the need for an inclusive and supportive environment where Students with hearing impairments can integrate into classroom processes.

4.2.3 Hearing Students' Perceptions of the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments

The perspectives of hearing students towards the inclusion of their peers with hearing impairments were analyzed to uncover shared perceptions and barriers. Their accounts reveal both empathy and frustration due to communication gaps, highlighting a need for inclusive peer education. All the hearing students included in the research believe in including their peers with hearing impairments. They shared a consensus with the idea of inclusion, though their experiences were different. The hearing students demonstrated empathy and a willingness to help, while it was evident for some students that they had difficulty in making changes to lessons that might move at an accelerated pace, as when they did not require accommodations for their hearing impairment peers.

Participants in the FGD with hearing students shared, part expressed a clear desire to help but stated that issues in communication had been a barrier.

"We want to help SWHIs; however, sometimes we not sure how to support them".

Although a few students had individually expressed interest in learning sign language, this interest was clearly voiced during the FGD, where students collectively reflected:

"If we had someone to teach us, even simple signs, we could talk more with them. We want to be friends, but don't know how." (FGD, Hearing Students)

In addition, FGD participants noted concerns about the pace of instruction, acknowledging that the inclusion of students with hearing impairment sometimes affected the flow of classroom activities. They recognized that this occasionally caused frustration, both for themselves and for their peers with hearing impairments, as everyone struggled to maintain classroom interaction.

4.3 Academic Performance and Classroom Participation

This theme considers how students with hearing impairments (SWHI) are viewed academically and in terms of participation in classrooms that are inclusive in education.

4.3.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic Performance of SWHI

Based on the analysis of interviews, observations, and document data, a frequent perception among regular education teachers is that SWHIs are lagging behind their hearing peers academically. This perceived distinction is mostly due to the differences in ability to communicate and the lack of delivery of instruction appropriate to their needs.

All four teachers interviewed indicated that SWHIs face strenuous challenges in following oral instructions and engaging with verbal activities in the classroom. This lack of access to spoken instruction leads to consistent academic disadvantages.

RET1: "It's difficult to say students with hearing impairment are performing at the same level as their hearing classmates."

This is reflective of the communicative and structural deficits these students experience in classrooms where the educational needs of the students are not addressed.

RET2: "Their results are weaker because of problems with understanding spoken language."

This reveals how limited access to verbal communication can have a serious effect on the ability of students to understand content and succeed academically.

RET3: "Since students with hearing impairments don't grasp the content, we can't anticipate their results being the same."

This suggests that the achievement gap is not a reflection of students' intellectual potential but a result of unmet communication needs in the classroom. These results support the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which emphasizes proactive instructional design to accommodate diverse learner needs.

RET4: "Despite some working hard and improving, their performance would begin to decline as lessons become more advanced and involve more talking."

Here, in spite of effort and determination on the part of students, academic performance is undermined over time by increasing complexity of content and the lack of accessible communication strategies.

Observations supported these impressions. Students with Hearing impairments were frequently attentive but passive, and had minimal participation in class discussions. Teachers' reliance on verbal instruction and minimal use of visual aids or sign language supported explanations acted to further widen the communication gap. Board writing and gestures were used sporadically and often did not provide sufficient clarity. Document analysis also revealed that SWHI showed declining performance in those subjects that entail intensive use of language, such as English and science. Such findings underscore the link between inaccessible instruction and academic underachievement. FGD with teachers further supported these perceptions, revealing that students with hearing impairments were often reluctant to participate in class discussions or ask questions. Teachers attributed this to communication challenges and the absence of supportive strategies that would facilitate more active engagement.

The findings show that teachers perceive a considerable academic gap between SWHI and hearing students, driven to a great degree by the ongoing lack of available communication in the classroom. The perceptions highlight the critical necessity for prompt instructional modifications, including visual supports, sign language support, and inclusive pedagogy training for teachers, to bridge this gap and offer equal learning opportunities to all students.

4.3.2 Students perceptions on Academic Achievement

Students with hearing impairments (SWHI) and their hearing peers report sharing a common identification of differences in achievement in the inclusive classroom setting. Students with

hearing impairments share a clear identification of their academic status compared to their hearing peers. One student openly revealed the problems that they face in understanding lessons:

SWHI1: The reason that we do not know what the teacher teaches in the class is clear, so our performance is always low.

Such a confession illustrates that SWHIs are very much conscious about the barriers they encounter, particularly the difficulty of following oral commands, which has been revealed to negatively influence their performance. Another student testified to the same, illustrating the mutual understanding among SWHI:

SWHI2: "I know that because I am not able to hear, I miss out in class. That is why my grades are always low."

Hearing students also recognized the academic gap between their group and others with hearing impairments. One of the students said that additional support would be helpful to close the gap:

HS3: "Unless they receive special education support, their academic performance will be lower than that of other hearing students."

This response emphasizes that hearing students identify the achievement gap as being the direct result of a lack of support rather than due to any fundamental difference in their ability relative to students with hearing impairments. Focus group discussions, which were probed for overriding themes, emphasized that students with hearing impairments were performing not because they lacked intellectual capacity but because of communication difficulties encountered at lower academic levels. During the focus group discussion with teachers, they stated:

FGD participant 1: "If teachers explain well and support them, they can learn like everyone else, but the biggest barrier is our lack of experience and training in sign language and lack of sign language interpreters."

Focus group discussions with hearing students indicated that:

FGD participant 2: "Teachers do not use sign language in the teaching and learning process. Students with hearing impairments, therefore, fail to understand and are given poor grades."

These results put into perspective the critical role of teacher preparedness and inclusive communication practices in bridging the achievement gap in academic success. The inability to apply inclusive communication tactics (e.g., sign language to visually communicate) is recognized as the most important obstacle to equal access to learn. In general, both SWHIs and their hearing peers in class and the members of the focus groups provided views that underline the need for overtures to move beyond communication obstacles within class interactions. These narratives highlight the importance of universal pedagogical approaches and individual support systems that provide equal opportunities to thrive at school for hearing students, and students with hearing impairments.

4.3.3 Determinants of Academic Engagement of Students with Hearing Impairments

The learning success of students with hearing impairments (SWHI) was demonstrated through a multitude of related factors in an inclusive classroom environment. One of the factors most often cited by the teachers and students was related to barriers in communication. Difficulty in understanding oral directions because no sign language was modeled by the teachers was consistently highlighted. Teachers acknowledged that poor communication prevented SWHIs to not fully comprehending the material in class. For example, one teacher testified that poor student academic achievement was directly related to their poor comprehension of words being verbally communicated by the teacher. This was complemented by the students themselves, who provided testimony that they did not always comprehend what the teacher was saying, and this led to poorer performance consistently.

In addition to the issues of communication, class participation was also reported as a key factor of influence. From the analysis of observational data, it was observed that SWHIs was less actively involved in classes. This was attributed to various reasons, including anxiety, feeling excluded, not being able to keep up with group discussions, and feeling as if lessons were not meant for them. Some of the students reported that teachers inadvertently disadvantaged pupil support by refusing to provide opportunities for interactions among students. Field observation confirms that SWHI concentration during class interactions, particularly while undertaking group activity and reading exercises, is lower in comparison than their hearing peers.

The second important variable that influenced the academic performance was the teaching methodology and the participation of the teacher. Teachers agreed that they spent more time

listening to students because they found it easier to communicate with them. This implicit bias caused the absence of adapted pedagogy for SWHIs. A few educators asked if their pedagogy was working properly when they could not fortify an already established communication base with SWHIs. They wanted more training regarding inclusive pedagogy and sign language to further improve the actual learning experience for students with hearing impairments.

In conclusion, SWHIs educational success in mixed classrooms was impacted by a combination of communication barriers, lack of participation in classroom activities, and insufficiently adapted pedagogy. These cumulative issues are all intently related and will have to be proactively addressed through teacher improvement.

4.4 Communication and interaction in inclusion

This section describes how communication plays a significant role in affecting the academic and social experiences of students with a hearing impairment (SWHI) in inclusive classrooms.

4.4.1 Communication Challenges between the teachers and Students with Hearing Impairments.

One of the main barriers identified by the teachers was their inability to use sign language, which was viewed as a significant barrier to communicating and understanding SWHIs. During a focus group discussion with teachers, it was clearly expressed that:

"It is clear that SWHIs are struggling with communicating with normal teachers, because none of us learned sign language a critical shortcoming in teacher training program"

This limit on communication was seen as an immediate barrier to instruction and assessing the academic progress of SWHIs. The teachers reported that they had no way of knowing if they could confirm that SWHI were being taught, or if they even understood what the teachers were talking about. Observational data also supported this, where it was found that conversations between SWHI and normal teachers were significantly less than hearing students. This lack of communication not only limited monthly academic progress but also limited the social participation of SWHI because they were less able to converse and request clarification from their teachers.

Overall, the teacher's inability to communicate with SWHI because of the teacher's inability to use sign language proficiently was a serious barrier to SWHI's academic learning and social

inclusion. Resolving this issue would require extra training for teachers in sign language and inclusive communication practices in a bid to improve comprehension and engagement.

4.4.2 Peer-to-Peer Communication and Interaction

Social interaction and communication between students with hearing impairment (SWHI) and their hearing peers was a significant factor that affected social experiences in inclusive classrooms. Hearing peers were willing to interact and help Students with hearing impairments, but the barrier in communication was a significant problem.

As one SWHI clarified:

SWHI: "Both the teachers and students are willing to assist our fellow classmates, but the biggest problem is that we don't understand each other's language. We students with hearing impairments use sign language and the majority of the students and teachers don't know sign language"

This reflects the eagerness to interact, yet the communication gap that existed to preclude meaningful interaction. Despite this, there were also some positive interactions. Students who were not hearing-impaired tried to learn basic sign language, and through this, there was improved communication. Observation reflected more positive social interaction among peers as a result. Both teachers and hearing students observed that SWHI would socialize with students who had similar disabilities, likely due to ease of communication and understanding. While this provides a sense of community for SWHI, it can also lead to segregation within the inclusive setting. Language problems restricted peer social interaction, yet positive interventions such as hearing students learning sign language facilitated more integrated social relationships.

4.4.3 The Role of Sign Language in Inclusive Classrooms

Sign language was identified as a key area in bringing about effective inclusion of students with hearing impairments. All interview and focus group participants emphatically maintained that effective communication through sign language is not a luxury but a requirement for inclusive classrooms. Yet, unavailability of trained interpreters and poor sign language proficiency on the part of teachers were cited as major impediments.

The stakeholders highlighted the development and promotion of Ethiopian Sign Language (ESL), with the concern being that this gap undermines the rights of students with hearing impairments. They advocated for the institutionalization of SL in the school system to enable equal learning opportunities.

As one SWHI explained:

"If all the teachers know sign language, or we had sign language interpreters in the classes, we could have got the opportunity. But it is not possible. We are learning in inclusive classrooms only in name, and nobody cares about our learning process."

This assertive statement underscores the paramount necessity to bring sign language to the forefront of inclusive education practice. If this foundational issue is not dealt with, efforts at inclusion risk being superficial rather than substantive.

4.5 Instruction Strategies, Support, and Mechanisms

This theme looks at the actual instruction strategies and support mechanisms used or needed for effective inclusion.

4.5.1 Instruction Strategies for Students with Hearing Impairments

Teachers reported attempting varied measures to support students with hearing impairment through altering instruction approaches. These included the utilization of visual aids, organizing group activities, and, to a limited degree, employing elementary sign communication. However, in-class observations ratified inconsistencies between reported practice and actual practice. Although visual aids and certain inclusive practices were being done, these were not systematically performed. More urgently, the access of students with hearing impairments to class and their ability to learn effectively was still limited.

RET2 reported

"We try to use group work and visual aid, but honestly, since we don't have sign language training, we can't reach all students as much."

RET3 added:

"We understand we need to support all students, and we try with what we have. But we don't have sign language abilities, and at times we just hope the student understands by watching."

Another student who has hearing impairment explained:

"Sometimes they put up a picture or sign on the board, but most of the time, I don't understand because no one is interpreting it with sign language."

Another student reinforced the invisibility that they perceive in the classroom:

"None of the teachers themselves don't even know that we are present in the classroom. They just narrate all of it quietly out loud and scribble some quick notes on the blackboard, but to us, no one does it in sign language."

These findings bring to the fore the gap between planned inclusive practices and actual classroom practice. Even where there is a need for inclusive practices, the lack of meaningful follow-through and adequate training weakens their impact. The conclusion is that actual inclusion requires not just awareness but consistent practice supported in terms of skills and resources.

4.5.2 Availability and Use of Resources

A theme throughout the data gathered was the lack of available qualified sign language interpreters, as a significant barrier to including students with hearing impairments. Both students and teachers identified that not having any interpreters available made it nearly impossible for students with hearing impairments to be included in the classroom.

RET1 stated:

"SWHI can't keep up with lessons without interpreters. They miss out on key information, which academically holds them back in general."

Similarly, students indicated the challenge they face in understanding the material without interpreters. One student noted: "If we had interpreters, I could learn everything. Now, I'm learning bits of the lesson." When there are no interpreters, SWHI's ability to access the Curriculum is severely limited, leaving them relying on bits and pieces of the lesson, leaving many to have gaps in their understanding.

Teachers in the FGD indicated that:

"We try to teach with gestures and basic signs, but that simply does not work. The students look confused, and we cannot truly engage with them."

In addition to needing interpreters, many participants also commented on the lack of accessible and specialized educational resources, including sign language transcribed textbook resources for SWHI students, visual resources, and assistive technologies. It was believed and identified that these resources are needed to engage with the curriculum and acquire further understanding.

RET2 stated that:

"We don't have textbooks in sign language or any visual resources that are adapted for these students. It is a huge limitation. They need to have resources that meet their learning needs."

Students with hearing impairments shared similar perspectives. One student noted:

"The resources we have are not appropriate for us. Sometimes we only use teacher-directed stuff, but it is not easy without the right resources."

Even when resource centers are often described as being helpful, that is a great start, but the potential of these centers is not being fully realized.

One more SWHIs commented,

"Accessing a resource center did improve my academic performance. If the centers were better supported, they could be even more effective."

This answer indicates that resource centers have tremendous potential to improve the academic performance of students with hearing impairments but that their underuse currently reflects a deficit in both the resources and support available to maximize their effectiveness.

RET4 said:

"The resource center is there, but we don't use it as much as we possibly can. There is no sort of framework on how to implement it in our lessons."

Finally, Special Needs Education (SNE) teacher expertise was greatly appreciated. Teachers who had some understanding of sign language or experience working with SWHI were considered worth having in the school setting. Despite this, few SNE-trained teachers were a significant concern.

The focus group discussion with teachers highlighted that:

"We need more specialist teaching staff who can communicate well with students with hearing impairments. There is a shortage of trained SNE teachers, which limits the amount of support we can provide."

Their expert knowledge was highly valued, but not having enough of these kinds of teachers meant that they were unable to provide ongoing, one-to-one support for students with hearing impairments. Students also valued their SNE teachers, with a student with hearing impairment commented:

"Our special educational needs teachers are very useful to us, but I don't think there are enough professional teachers for special educational needs."

This chapter reveals a supreme need for more and larger resources, trained personnel, and better infrastructure to facilitate the inclusion of SWHI in mainstream classes, and to enhance their academic success and overall learning experience. The evidence reveals the need for greater access to interpreters, modified materials, and resource centers, as well as the need to increase the number of SNE qualified teachers.

4.5.3 Perceived Support for Students with Hearing Impairments

Students with hearing impairments indicated a severe shortage of needed support, and it was listed as one of the greatest limiting factors to their full integration into the learning environment. A student identified the shortage of support and remarked, "Not at all. 'What Support!', 'No support' we are the disadvantaged and neglected students." The quotation reveals frustration by students who feel ignored and excluded when they are not given adequate support. A further student had observed occasional attempts from others to give support, but identified an underlying issue: "I feel good when others try to help us because we can have better outcomes, but there is a language issue". This finds the intersection of support and communication failure

further preventing students from engaging in the learning process fully. These terms underscore the core requirement of a support network that is tailored to address the needs of the students both academically and in enabling their full participation in the learning process, with the goal of their integration and achievement.

4.6 Opportunities and Benefits of Inclusion

Despite the challenges, the participants listed several benefits of inclusion, such as greater social interaction, motivation towards school, greater access to facilities, and enjoyment of students' rights. Socially, inclusion broke barriers and encouraged greater hearing and understanding between the hearing and non-hearing students, lessening stigma and strengthening friendships. Student. (Sorry, When. together, I feel like part of the class, and it's easier to make friends." In educational settings, students with hearing impairment expressed feelings of involvement and motivation, particularly when they were included in class activities. Student two (SWHI) shared, "I do better when I'm included in lessons and get help." Resources like the resource center and tutorial classes supported all students but were especially crucial for those with hearing impairments. Teachers and students acknowledged that these resources were key to providing equitable learning opportunities. In addition, inclusion was treated as safeguarding the education rights of students with hearing impairments, but the group members of FGD identified inconsistency in policy implementation and additional support needs as problematic, stating: "We still need more training for teachers and more support from the school.

4.7 Participants' Reflections on Improving Effective Inclusion

This section presents participant reflections on how improvements can be made for students with hearing impairments. The reflections are derived from participants' experiences as teachers at the intersection of learners with hearing impairments and students who do not have hearing impairments. Rather than sophisticated recommendations, these reflections contain practical gaps and opportunities for developing inclusion.

4.7.1 Accessible Communication Needed

A consistent concern among participant groups focused on the value of open communication and effective transition of knowledge inside the classroom. The teachers repeatedly noted that the limited knowledge of sign language compromised their ability to teach. A teacher explained:

"Even when we try gestures or writing, it's not enough. We need to be appropriately trained to communicate efficiently."

Similarly, students with hearing impairment explained:

"If there's some other teacher who can interpret, it is better."

Another contributor (RET2) noted:

"Again, it would be better to have another teacher to interpret so that SWHIs could hear as best they can. That way, they will be able to learn in a fully inclusive classroom. How are they going to learn if they do not hear what is being taught? We cannot say they are learning simply because they are sitting in the classroom."

These concerns articulate that inclusive communication is not merely an aspiration; it requires systematic training and system support in a way that enables teachers to create genuine learning for all learners.

4.7.2 Need for Specialist Support and Teacher Training

Teachers understood inclusive education, but not in terms of being able to create it in practice. As teachers highlighted in a focus group:

"We understand inclusive education, but in practice we don't feel ready to teach more than one group of students at the same time."

They elaborated on the absolute requirement for persistent training, experience and professionalism within special needs to capture the dealings of practice when including students with hearing impairments in an inclusive classroom.

4.7.3 Insufficient Learning Materials and Individualized Support

The students with hearing impairments and the hearing students both recognized the lack of individualized learning materials. Hearing students in FGDs stated:

"They are not being given the same support. If there had been sign language books or an aide, they would have been more informed."

In fact, SWHIs demonstrated even greater angst:

"The reason we came far away left our families was because we believed the school had enough teachers and academic support for special needs students, but then when we got here, there were no materials for us and no special help. We just sit in class and try to keep up like everyone else, and that is hard. Reality is not what we thought."

Observations backed the finding; the instruction was mostly auditory, and relatively little visual material as used. Also, documents that were sampled as part of the analysis revealed that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that pertained to students with hearing impairments, did not, in fact, exist. The documents also indicated that students with hearing impairments were academically less successful than students who hear.

4.7.4 Peer Interaction and Social Inclusion

Participants also commented on social inclusion. Students with hearing impairments spoke about feeling excluded, which was not the fault of other people, but because of communication issues. One student said: "Even if they want to help us, they don't know how". There were hearing students who also wanted to help their classmates who were learners with hearing impairments, but too did not know how to bridge the gap. These results suggested the importance of peer-sensitization programs and inclusive extracurricular opportunities that brought together camaraderie and identity for all students.

4.7.5 Emotional Well-being and Retention Concerns

The Emotional consequences of a lack of inclusion arose as the last major theme. Some SWHI revealed that an ongoing lack of academic and social success caused them to think about dropping out of school. One SWHI said: "Sometimes, we prefer to stop our schooling, leave, and do any kind of daily work." The lack of recognition or encouragement was typically the reason for withdrawal. This was further demonstrated by teachers who supported students with hearing impairments, illustrating the importance of developing a positive and encouraging learning environment.

4.8 Theoretical Analysis of Findings

The findings of this study, when viewed through the lens of established theoretical frameworks, reveal a significant gap between the ideals of inclusive education and the reality at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School. The 'social model of disability' posits that disability is caused by the way

society is organized, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. The challenges faced by SWHI in this study are not inherent to their hearing loss but are a direct result of an educational system that has not adapted to meet their needs. The lack of sign language proficiency among teachers, the scarcity of interpreters and appropriate learning materials, and the reliance on auditory teaching methods are all societal barriers that create a disabling environment.

Furthermore, the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocate for multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, are not being consistently applied. While some teachers reported using visual aids and group work, these efforts were sporadic and insufficient. A UDL approach would necessitate a more systematic integration of visual and kinesthetic learning opportunities, as well as the provision of materials in accessible formats, to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn. The recurring theme of communication breakdown underscores the critical need for a more robust implementation of inclusive policies. The current situation, where students are physically present in the classroom but are not fully participating, aligns with what scholars term 'integrative' rather than 'inclusive' education. True inclusion requires a fundamental shift in pedagogy, resources, and school culture.

In summary, the perceptions of participants demonstrate that facilitating quality inclusive education for students with hearing impairments constitutes multi-level, concerted efforts. These include communication-focused teacher training, specialist professional development, access to adapted learning materials, school-wide peer awareness programs, and special emotional support systems. While there is growing awareness of inclusive education principles at a policy level, the gap between theory and effective implementation in daily classroom life remains significant. It is necessary to deal with these daily problems reported by participants to create truly inclusive learning environments where all students, including students with hearing impairments, can grow academically and socially.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter four explicitly linking the results to the study's objectives and existing literature. The aim is to provide full insights around teachers' and students' perceptions of the inclusion of students with hearing impairments (SWHI) in mainstream classrooms and to discuss the broader implications of these findings.

5.1 Contextual Overview

The demographic characteristics of participants (which are detailed in Chapter four) are relevant in understanding the differences in participant perceptions. Specifically, teacher experience and training were relevant in their levels of confidence and perceptions of inclusive education. The ages, grades, and backgrounds of the learners (ignoring their hearing impairment), were also related to their perceptions. Therefore, aspects of the context are significant in understanding themes that was explained and discussed in later sections.

5.2 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Inclusion

5.2.1 Teachers' Perceptions

The teachers showed a wide range of perceptions with regards to students with hearing impairments being included in any form of mainstream education as seen in the three cases. While many were in support of inclusion, their perceptions regarding their actual ability to implement inclusion were restricted by limited training and inadequate resources. Generally, it was found that teachers (especially those with no formal training in special needs education) felt unprepared and expressed uncertainty about meeting the learning needs of students with hearing impairments. These findings are consistent with Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who noted that inadequate training is a barrier to positive perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Similarly, Forlin (2010) argued that training in special and inclusive education improves teachers' confidence and perceptions. Additionally, teachers who had recently participated in professional development programs on inclusive education reported being less concerned about the concept of inclusion and were more willing to try effective strategies such

as visual aids and alternative communication methods. This supports Forlin's argument that systematic professional development promotes the normalization of inclusive practices.

Furthermore, negative perceptions, which often stemmed from frustration, stereotypes or lack of institutional support, were clearly barriers to their implementation of meaningful inclusion. This observation aligns with Fentaw (2019) who found that misperceptions about disability hinder genuine engagement in inclusive classrooms. Hence, improving teachers' perceptions requires both continuous training and practical exposure to successful inclusive experiences.

5.2.2 Students' Perceptions

Students with hearing impairments reported a range of experiences that shaped their perceptions of inclusion. While some participants reported feeling supported and included, others indicated feelings of isolation and exclusion. These varied perceptions align with Antia et al. (2002), who identified a relationship between barriers to communication and decreased social acceptance, which often results in reduced perceptions of inclusion for students. Conversely, positive instances that included teachers and/or peers providing accommodations for students with hearing impairments such as extra time or visual supports were reported by students as contributing to increased confidence and greater participation in the classroom. This was perceived to enable an inclusive learning environment.

Similar to the previous section, hearing students represented a range of perceptions about their peers with hearing impairments. Some hearing students were very empathetic and willing to support their peers with hearing impairments, while others expressed discomfort and uncertainty about how to provide support often due to simply not knowing how to interact appropriately. These findings lend support to Mekonnen et al. (2016), who noted that natural social hesitations regarding disability or experiences of incapacity can limit interaction due to a lack of understanding about what appropriate support may be needed. Consequently, this suggests that awareness programs and peer education, as supported by Kamps et al. (2001), can address gaps in awareness of disabilities among hearing students by fostering greater understanding, reducing stigma, and encouraging inclusive peer relationships.

5.3 Academic Engagement and Achievement

Academic performance was one of the domains influenced by both perceptions and the teaching methods implemented in the classroom. Teachers perceived students with hearing impairments (SWHI) to be less academically engaged than their hearing students, with the primary contributing factors being communication issues and a lack of instructional support. Barriers to classroom discussion were largely associated with poorer academic performance, highlighting uncertainty about current pedagogical effectiveness. The notion of SWHI's academic disadvantages is validated by Dawit (2020), who stated that SWHI are academically disadvantaged when they lack effective support mechanisms.

Students with hearing impairments also expressed concerns about their ability to access instructional information when they were unable to follow the scheduled pace of instruction due to limited contextual cues. Concerns about not being able to fully understand or follow instructions illustrate the need for instructions to be more accessible. However, the use of various instructional methods, including visual materials and written information, led to significantly greater motivation and classroom involvement among students. This suggests that access to learning materials with proper assistance holds immense potential for academic success. Some participants viewed these challenges as cognitive limitations, while others recognized them as issues related to communication access. The perceptions of peers can also be a factor influencing the motivation, participation, and social integration of SWHIs in the classroom. In order for students to have equitable classroom and academic engagement, it is important that teaching strategies include methods that enhance accessibility, such as visual support, written prompts, and appropriate wait time.

5.4 Communication, Interaction, and Social Dynamics

Communication was a central theme in how both teachers and students understood inclusion. Many teachers discussed the lack of sign language skills as a barrier to meaningful communication with students with hearing impairments, which limited their confidence in effectively including SWHI in the inclusive classroom. This communication gap illustrates how the absence of a basic communication tool can significantly hinder interaction in an inclusive education context. Students with hearing impairments also described challenges with peer engagement. While some felt supported by classmates, others reported experiencing feelings of

isolation due to a lack of mutual understanding. These communication gaps support Hankins' (2015) observation that such social barriers can fragment communication within inclusive environments, ultimately preventing the development of peer relationships.

Incidents of bullying and exclusionary social behavior created additional challenges for several SWHIs. These students often expressed feeling left out during group work or team activities. Additionally, some hearing peers expressed uncertainty about how to engage with their classmates with hearing impairments within their social groups. However, other hearing students demonstrated empathy and a willingness to assist their peers, although it was unclear whether this support translated into consistent and direct communication. The intention to help was evident, but the execution was not always clear or effective. Many stakeholders recognize the importance of fostering a classroom environment based on empathy, respect, and collaboration to support all students. This supports Mulugeta's (2020, 2022) conclusions, which emphasize that inclusive social context require direct, structured, and supportive actions in order to sustain respectful peer interactions within inclusive settings.

5.5 Challenges and Strategies for Inclusive Education

The study listed several challenges that constrain the efficacy of inclusive education measures and influence the perceptions of participants. The primary challenges were a lack of resources, limited support services, and no access to supporting technologies. The obstacles primarily restricted the effective use of inclusive measures, as there were adverse perceptions towards the possibility of inclusion. Supportive leadership and availability of essential resources are the prerequisites for an effective, conducive and inclusive learning setting, according to the Salamanca Statement (1994). Preparation and teacher training were the main difficulties, and this had a direct impact on teachers' perceptions of competence. The majority of the teachers did not feel prepared to manage the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms, which had a further impact on their confidence and teaching performance. This finding aligns with Abebe (2019), which highlighted that insufficient training in special education and inclusive pedagogies presents a major initial barrier to effective inclusion.

In order to respond to these challenges, the study identified the importance of implementing effective pedagogical practices, such as differentiated instruction, co-teaching, and the use of sign language and visual aids. These strategies not only provide a better learning environment

that is inclusive for students with hearing impairments but also reinforce teachers' beliefs in their ability to manage inclusive classrooms. Moreover, effective support systems and collaboration are essential. Inter professional partnerships between special education personnel, regular educators, parents, and the community will make inclusive practice more effective and lead to improved educational outcomes for students with hearing impairments.

5.6 Improving Effective Inclusion

Teacher training has been identified as a key component of successful inclusion and changing perceptions. Teachers who experienced inclusive teaching procedures felt more confident and were more creative in their ways of teaching. Professional development, particularly blended learning opportunities with real-world experiences that include access to practical resources for teaching, were recognized as the most instrumental in changing teachers' perceptions of what inclusive learning might entail. This aligns with Florian's (2014) recommendation that teacher professional development should be an ongoing and contextually grounded practice.

Teacher participants demonstrated a particular need for more tangible teacher training, access to mentor-type opportunities, and sharing platforms like resource centers to increase self-efficacy and their perceptions of ability to manage an inclusive educational approach. Many teacher participants also mentioned that short workshops were typically insufficient unless these included follow-up sessions or classroom experiences. Ongoing mentoring, peer observations and the building of communities of practice for inclusive teaching were recognized by teachers as other useful approaches for managing established changed perceptions of practice related to inclusion. Also, it appears there was a preference among participants for a whole-school approach to inclusion, which suggests this better promotes inclusivity than an individualized approach. Therefore, there is strong potential in strengthening school-wide capacity by equipping teachers with appropriate tools, support structures, and continuous professional learning opportunities. By doing so, schools can foster classrooms that teachers perceive as more inclusive, capable, and empathetic, ultimately promoting positive perceptions and sustainable inclusive practices.

5.7 Summary of the Discussions

This chapter presented and analyzed the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments (SWHI) at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School. The

findings indicated that although many teachers had positive perceptions towards the concept of inclusion, their perceived ability to implement it effectively was often limited by a lack of training, resources, and institutional support. Teachers who had some experience with inclusive practices or even minimal training demonstrated greater confidence and employed more adaptable instructional strategies. In contrast, teachers without such exposure often expressed feelings of unpreparedness, which negatively shaped their perceptions and practices.

Students with hearing impairments also reported mixed experiences that shaped their views on inclusion. Some felt supported and accepted, particularly in classrooms where visual aids, sign language, and inclusive teaching methods were used. The use of sign language, in particular, has proved to be a powerful tool for bridging communication gaps, enhancing student–teacher and home–school relationships, and fostering a more inclusive and participatory learning environment. However, students who relied entirely on oral communication and lacked access to effective communication supports reported increased social isolation, miscommunication, and more negative perceptions of inclusion.

The findings further suggest that academic engagement and achievement among SWHIs were closely linked to their access to communication, the teaching strategies used, and the quality of peer interactions. These factors are often shaped by foundational perceptions held by both teachers and students. Moreover, structural barriers such as the absence of assistive technology and inadequate institutional support significantly hindered the implementation of inclusive practices. Nonetheless, the study found that when visual tools, collaborative learning approaches, and responsive teaching methods were in place, they had the potential to mitigate these barriers and improve perceptions of inclusion.

In conclusion of the discussions, the study underscores the importance of comprehensive teacher training particularly in sign language, the development of school-wide support systems, and the promotion of peer understanding and empathy. When these components are well-integrated, they can contribute to a more equitable, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all students, including those with hearing impairments.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

This study looked at teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta. The following conclusions were reached from this study:

Teachers felt that inclusive education was valuable in principle, but they were limited by practical issues which limited their perceptions of inclusion. Specifically, the lack of formal training in inclusive pedagogy, limited experience with sign language, and a lack of available adaptations to use in instruction made the teachers feel inadequate and frustrated. The majority of teachers perceived that SWHI's learning challenges were not because they were incapable of learning, but rather because of limitations in communication barriers and teacher's abilities to modify instruction. Students without hearing impairments provided supportive but conflicting perceptions around their inclusion of peers. Whilst many reported positive perceptions and empathy, they also reported having difficulties fully engaging with students with hearing impairments. Their perceptions were shaped by a lack of knowledge of sign language, low incidence of exposure to inclusive practice, and classroom arrangements which did not facilitate interaction. Ultimately, despite their attempts to be supportive of inclusion, they often felt disconnected. Students with hearing impairments enjoyed inclusion in a mainstream class but felt that their inclusion was superficial. Their experiences included little peer or teacher interaction while feeling included in classroom practices. There were no examples of sign language usage, little teacher support and no modified instruction to accommodate the students with hearing impairments, which contributed to a perceived absence of educational enjoyment. Without clear boundaries, there is a difference between inclusion as a descriptor and educational inclusion.

The study also indicated the teachers were drawing on generic instructional strategies (such as repeating information or sporadic gestures) to engage students with hearing impairments, but there was little evidence of intentional, inclusive teaching approaches. Strategies such as visual support, differentiated instruction, and content using sign language support were rarely used. These perceived constraints from both teachers and students hold importance when teachers

promote participation and consider the underperformance of students with hearing impairments. These contexts further highlight the necessity for systematic and purposeful instructional adaptations. Teachers', students with hearing impairments', and hearing students' perceptions were unified that the academic performance of SWHIs was consistently about lower than their classmates. These perceptions were attributed to challenges in understanding oral directions and minimal classroom communication, not lack of intellectual ability. Both teachers and students expressed that performance might improve if instructional support and communication were successfully addressed.

In a general concluding statement, the perception of teachers and students at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School suggests that while inclusion is generally accepted, it is not yet demonstrated in practice. Significant barriers found in the current study include communication, lack of teacher readiness, and no alternate instructional methods. These barriers will continue to inhibit meaningful inclusion of students with hearing impairments as long as they remain unaddressed and continue to exist despite national policies suggesting inclusive education.

6.2. Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to support students with hearing impairments. These recommendations are based on the perceptions of both teachers and students involved in the study.

Increasing Teachers' Capacity and Competency

Teachers felt unprepared to successfully include students with hearing impairments in regular classrooms. This highlights the need for targeted, ongoing professional development focused on inclusive education and sign language communication. Training should equip teachers with practical strategies to improve accessibility and interaction with students with hearing impairments. Improving teachers' competence will also build their confidence and enhance meaningful engagement for all students.

Enhancing communication and interaction in the classroom

Both teachers and students identified communication barriers as a major challenge. Schools should implement structured peer support systems and basic sign language training for all

students to enhance classroom interaction. Promoting mutual understanding among students through shared communication tools is essential for inclusive learning environments

Utilizing Inclusive Teaching Practices

In the study, participants believed that current classroom practices are not suitably adapted to accommodate the learning needs of students with hearing impairments. Teachers should be supported and supervised by school administrators to implement inclusive methods such as visual aids, differentiated instruction, and sign-supported strategies. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to use inclusive teaching strategies, such as visual aids, differentiated instruction, and sign language supported teaching strategies. Education should be designed to enable each participant, regardless of hearing status, to participate and disengage in the learning. This recommendation is intended to facilitate bridging the gap between physical inclusion and educational participation as described in the participants' perceptions.

Building Administrative and Institutional Support

Teachers' perspectives also indicated that the lack of administrative support for inclusion hindered their ability to succeed in inclusive and adaptive teaching. School leaders need to prioritize inclusive education in all aspects of resourcing and decision-making. This should include costs for training teachers, assistive materials, and direct resources for adapting classrooms. Furthermore, regular follow-up and supervision must be conducted within the school, and if necessary, with support from the district to ensure that actions based on inclusion are being implemented as intended. By demonstrating support through administrative practices, emphasis shifts from viewing inclusion as a challenge to recognizing it as a shared school responsibility.

Creating Student Awareness and Empathy

The views of the hearing students portrayed a limited awareness of the experiences of students with hearing impairments, and so to respond to this it is possible for schools to develop awareness programs that focus on disability, inclusion, communication, and respect for other students. These programs will seek to create empathy and dispel uncertainty; in addition to these programs, there may be scope for schools to create opportunities where all

students partake in inclusive co-curricular activities which can build social ties and improve perceptions of students with mixed abilities. An informed and empathic student body will ultimately contribute to an inclusive culture.

Fostering Ongoing Research and Feedback Mechanisms

The perceptions that surfaced throughout this study also demonstrated the significance of ongoing inquiry and reflection. School administrators, in partnership with local education offices, should support research-based reviews and establish student feedback platforms to monitor inclusion efforts. Schools and educational stakeholders should facilitate ongoing research in all sorts of school settings to explore perceptions of inclusion from several, often very different perspectives. Further, actions should be taken to encourage the establishment of feedback mechanisms to allow students with hearing impairment, and their classroom peers, to ensure their voice is heard in terms of their experiences and suggestions. Schools can then, given their insights, incorporate them for future planning and/or evaluation processes that help the school in its decision-making about inclusion and inclusive practices.

This chapter highlighted the importance of perception as it relates to inclusion. Perceptions of teachers and students are not just mere opinions but representative of barriers and opportunities that exist or do not exist within the school community. Establishing an inclusive school community requires a well-designed commitment to listening to these perceptions, then responding with an informative and inclusionary action.

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APPENDICES

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Special Needs Education

Interview guidelines for teachers, students with hearing impairments, and students without hearing impairments about the perceptions of teachers and students towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta town.

Introduction

Dear Participant,

My name is Tezera Getachew, and I am conducting this research as part of the requirements for a Master's Degree (MA) at Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Behavioral Studies, Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

This study explores the perceptions of teachers and students towards the inclusion of students with hearing impairments at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town. The primary objective is to assess how teachers and students perceive the inclusion of students with hearing impairments in the classroom environment.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated and it will provide me with a better understanding of inclusive education. Your responses will remain completely confidential and used strictly for an academic context. Any data collected will be stored securely and for research purposes only. Your responses are so useful to me in developing my research, and I truly appreciate your time and assistance in this process.

Thanks once again for your time and participation in this research activity!

Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teachers

A. Demographic Information

- **Sex:** Male Female
- **Age:**
18-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 above 51
- **Educational Qualification:**
Certificate Diploma Degree Master's
- **Teaching experience in years:**
0-10 11-20 21-30 above 31
- **Field of study:** _____

B. Questions Related on Teachers' Perceptions toward the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments

1. How do you understand the inclusion of students with hearing impairments (SWHIs) in the school/regular classrooms?
2. Have you received training on sign language or inclusive education?
3. What teaching strategies or methods do you use to support students with hearing impairments?
4. Is there any educational performance difference between students with hearing impairment and students without hearing impairment?
5. What improvements do you think are needed to make inclusive teaching more effective?

Appendix II: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Students with Hearing Impairments

Part one: Background information

- a. Date of interview: _____
- b. Duration of interview: _____
- c. Gender: _____
- d. Level of Hearing Impairment: A. Hard of hearing B. Deaf
- e. Age of onset of the impairment: A. Pre-lingual B. post-lingual
- f. Grade _____

Part Two: Questions Related to Perceptions of the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments

- 1. How do you feel about learning together with hearing students in the regular classroom?
- 2. How do you participate in classroom activities and interact with your hearing classmates?
- 3. What kinds of support do your teachers and classmates give you to help you learn in class?
- 4. What challenges do you face during class?
- 5. What improvements would help you learn better?

Appendix III: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Students without Hearing Impairments

Part One: Background Information

- a. Date of interview: _____
- b. Duration of interview: _____
- c. Gender: _____
- d. Grade: _____

Part Two: Questions Related to Perceptions of the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairments

1. How do you feel about learning in the same classroom as students who have hearing impairments?
2. How do you interact with students who have hearing impairments during lessons and other school activities?
3. What kind of support do you think your teachers give to students with hearing impairments in your class?
4. What challenges do you see in the classroom for SWHI?
5. What do you think should be improved to make learning easier for students with hearing impairments in your class?

Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

1. Place.....
2. Date of FGD conducted.....
3. FGD started athr. and ended at
4. Duration.....
5. Number of participants: Male..... Female..... Total.....

Questions related to perceptions of the inclusion of students with hearing impairments.

1. What is your opinion on the inclusion of students with hearing impairments in your school?
2. How do students with hearing impairments participate in classroom activities?
3. What teaching or classroom strategies support inclusion?
4. What challenges exist when trying to inclusion students with hearing impairments?
5. What should be improved to make inclusive learning better?

Appendix V: Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist on the Perceptions of Teachers and Students towards the Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment at Mulugeta Gadile Primary School in Sebeta Town.

1. Date of observation _____
2. Time of observation _____
3. Class/Grade Observed: _____
4. Observer's Name: _____

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Remark
1	Teachers actively involve students with hearing impairments in classroom activities.			
2	Students with hearing impairments are seated in a way that supports inclusion.			
3	Teachers and students interact with students with hearing impairments during lessons.			
4	The teacher incorporates visual aids or sign language to assist students with hearing impairments.			
5	Inclusive teaching methods are applied.			
6	Students with hearing impairments engage in group work and discussion.			
7	The teacher ensures students with hearing impairments follow the lesson effectively.			
8	Students with hearing impairments participate in playground and extracurricular activities.			

Other relevant observations:
