

Teaching Beyond Sound: Educators' Challenges and Strategies in Hospitality Programs for Students with Hearing Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategies and challenges faced by educators who teach students with hearing disabilities in a hospitality program at a higher learning institution in Malaysia. Eight (8) lecturers from the hospitality program at the Polytechnic and Community College participated in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using content analysis, facilitated by ATLAS.ti version 25, to identify themes and codes. The analysis revealed four key themes related to challenges: (1) communication barrier, (2) unique learning demands, (3) emotional and behavioral issues, and (4) institutional and resource limitations. These findings highlight the multifaceted barriers that educators encounter when teaching students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes training for lecturers, enhanced support services, and improved institutional policies to create a more inclusive learning environment. The findings also identify four themes for strategies that educators can apply to enhance teaching efficacy and student acceptability: (1) communication adaptability, (2) visual and experiential learning, (3) peer support and collaboration, and (4) encouraging independence and self-management. In conclusion, the findings emphasized the importance of creativity and patience, and educators must stay committed, strategic, and driven to thrive academically and professionally in any circumstances.

Keywords: Special education, hearing disability, challenges, strategies and hospitality education

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the increasing emphasis on inclusive education has led numerous higher education institutions to accept pupils with special needs, such as those with hearing disabilities. With the goal of preparing students for future industrial roles, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has established a plethora of educational institutions to serve disabled youths through polytechnics and community colleges. These institutions provide essential training in areas such as the hotel sector, foodservice, and culinary arts.

Educators in these institutions play an important role in grooming youth by providing them with various types of knowledge, including both theoretical concepts and practical skills, particularly students with disabilities.

Nevertheless, the implementation of inclusive teaching practices continues to present substantial challenges, despite the support provided at the policy level. Providing support for students with hearing disabilities is a significant institutional challenge because this group expects services but has inadequate understanding of

availability (Brett, 2010). Educators frequently discover that they are unable to effectively address the distinctive requirements of students with hearing disabilities due to a lack of resources, training, and support systems (Batista & García, 2023; Shpigelman, Mor, Sachs, & Schreuer, 2022). Still, they faced many challenges to ensure that students with hearing disabilities have the requisite knowledge and skills to secure and maintain employment (Kisanga, 2019).

According to Yusoff et al. (2024), the students have a positive attitude towards careers and jobs in the hospitality industry, although they find the hospitality workforce exhausting. To accomplish this, educators have to keep encouraging the students and strategizing a plan to achieve the best from them in learning with limitation. However, despite the support of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, educators still struggle to adapt their teaching techniques and resources for students with hearing disabilities (Rosli, Sabri, & Takril, 2024).

Understanding the realities faced by these educators is essential for informing policy, improving teaching and training, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices. Using a qualitative research design, this study will investigate the challenges and strategies experienced by educators, or to be more specific, lecturers teaching students with hearing disabilities at higher learning institutes in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Special Education in Malaysia

Special education has always been a unique part of the education system in schools and higher learning institutions. Education is continually developing to meet global requirements, from classic methods like chalk to technology-based learning (Musa, Zain, Ismail, Hussin, & Nordin, 2021). In Malaysia, the need for educational provision for the disabled people began in the 50s when the government, through the Ministry of Education, started to establish special education for children with special needs (Md Tah & Abdul Nasir, 2020). The Federation School, Malaysia's first and pioneering total residential school for the deaf, opened its doors in Penang in 1954, marking a watershed moment in the country's history of deaf education (MOE, 2022).

In addition, a number of universities and colleges now provide targeted career education programs in a variety of fields for students with disabilities. Presently, there are currently three polytechnics in Malaysia that offer programs in hospitality, graphic design, and fashion design: Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic, and Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic. Shah Alam Polytechnic and Ungku Omar Polytechnic, Ipoh, respectively, offer programs in civil engineering and mechanical engineering, and additional programs are being added (MOE, 2022).

However, students with disabilities typically have less defined academic pathways compared to their non-disabled peers. This disparity can limit their opportunities for advancement and hamper their overall educational experience. To address these challenges, it is crucial for educational institutions to develop tailored support systems and resources that promote inclusivity and provide equitable access to all programs. Owing to the great emphasis on the development of an all-round individual, Musa, Zain, Ismail, Hussin, & Nordin (2021) stated that there are many things that can be considered for improvement in special education in Malaysia, such as updates to the syllabus or curriculum that need to be given attention. Furthermore, Norazmi et al. (2019) propose significant improvements in the management and leadership of special education. Although Malaysia has achieved significant progress in the development of special education, more work is required to close implementation gaps, improve teacher preparation, and guarantee that all students with special needs have access to high-quality instruction and assistance. To help students with special needs integrate into society and lead fulfilled lives, educators in special education play a critical role in this situation (Ngang, 2012).

Persons with Disabilities at Higher Learning Institutions

A disability is defined as a denial or restriction of opportunities to participate in communal life as a result of a physical impediment (Goodley, 2016). Essentially, a disability is not solely a result of a medical condition.

Islam (2015) asserts that state institutions and non-state players often overlook and ignore disability as a development issue. Discrimination against people with disabilities manifests in various forms, including their participation in education (Kauffman, Anastasiou, Felder, Lopes, Hallenbeck, Hornby, & Ahrbeck, 2022).

The inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in higher learning institutions has gained increased attention over the past two decades, driven by global commitments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Higher education is recognized not only as a right but also as a critical factor for enhancing the social mobility and economic independence of PWDs. Despite national and institutional policies promoting inclusive education, access to tertiary education remains a challenge for many students with disabilities due to infrastructural, attitudinal, and systemic barriers (Moriña, 2020). Higher education presents problems different from those of elementary and secondary education, and the nature of the diversity that is called disability becomes more important as the demands, difficulty, and complexity of education increase. According to Kauffman, Anastasiou, Felder, Lopes, Hallenbeck, Hornby, & Ahrbeck (2022), some cases of disability, depending on their nature and severity, require creative thinking about equipment, technology, and sometimes more difficult-to-make accommodations and variation in presentation or participation, as in the case, for example, of hearing impairments and deaf-blindness.

A growing body of research has emphasized the structural and academic barriers faced by students with disabilities. These include inaccessible physical environments, lack of disability-friendly teaching materials, limited assistive technologies, and faculty members untrained in inclusive pedagogy (Kioiko & Mugo, 2022). Moreover, many institutions lack comprehensive support systems to address the diverse needs of these students, which include academic accommodations, counselling, and peer mentoring. These limitations not only impact the academic success of students with disabilities but also affect their sense of belonging within the campus environment (Zin, Abdullah, Zabidi, & Othman, 2023).

Attitudinal barriers are among the most persistent challenges in higher learning institutions. Students with disabilities often face stigma and low expectations from peers and faculty, which can negatively affect their confidence and academic engagement (Sukhbaatar et al., 2023). Research also indicates that while disability policies exist, their implementation is inconsistent across institutions. Staff members frequently report a lack of training and resources to adequately support students with varying types of disabilities, resulting in ad hoc and reactive measures rather than structured, proactive support strategies (Emmanuel & Akinyemi, 2024). This gap in support illustrates the importance of comprehensive training programs that equip faculty and staff with the tools necessary to foster an inclusive learning environment. By prioritizing consistent policy implementation and proactive support, institutions can significantly enhance the educational experience for students with disabilities, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and greater overall engagement.

Challenges and strategies in teaching and learning students with disabilities

Communication obstacles between academic personnel and disabled students could affect learning. Students with hearing impairments may struggle to follow lectures, as noted by Rosli, Sabri, & Takril (2024). Students with hearing impairments often face challenges in following lectures, particularly in large classrooms where effective use of audio-visual aids is lacking. Limited access to teaching resources is another widespread challenge. Educators frequently report the lack of teaching assistants, assistive technologies, and specialized materials needed to support students with disabilities.

In a recent study conducted in Ghana, educators cited overcrowded classrooms and lack of appropriate tools as major impediments to inclusive teaching (Mensah & Baafi, 2024). Likewise, Nickolai and Laesser (2022) noted that in U.S. schools, teachers were often expected to support students with disabilities without sufficient funding, leading to compromised instructional quality and teacher burnout.

A study by Mphahlele and Mahlo (2023) in South Africa revealed that educators struggle with implementing inclusive education due to ambiguous policy directions, lack of administrative backing, and inadequate classroom infrastructure. Similar concerns were echoed in a study across Jamaican public schools, where teachers cited inconsistent enforcement of inclusive policies and a mismatch between national directives and

actual classroom conditions (Johnson & Thomas, 2025). These gaps hinder teachers' ability to meaningfully include students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

One of the most persistent challenges educators faced was a lack of adequate training to work with students with disabilities. Many general education teachers enter the profession with minimal exposure to special education pedagogy, which negatively affects their confidence and effectiveness. According to Alshahrani (2022), Saudi teachers demonstrated low self-efficacy in inclusive settings due to limited training and a lack of ongoing professional development. Similarly, a European study by de Boer and Pijl (2021) found that even experienced educators felt underprepared to modify their teaching strategies to accommodate students with diverse learning needs.

Many teachers confront students' behavioural issues without adequate support from counsellors or administrators. Moreover, societal stigma and negative perceptions of disability can impact both teachers and students. A cross-country study by Kivunja et al. (2021) emphasized how cultural attitudes and lack of awareness contribute to marginalization in inclusive classrooms. Teachers reported emotional exhaustion and feelings of isolation, particularly when their efforts to include students with disabilities were not supported by parents or peers. These psychosocial challenges can undermine teachers' motivation and long-term commitment to inclusive practices.

Educators play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive and equitable education for students with disabilities by adopting specialized teaching strategies that cater to diverse needs. One widely implemented approach is differentiated instruction, which involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessment to match students' learning abilities, interests, and preferences (Tomlinson, 2014). Offering alternative communication methods and ensuring that all course materials are accessible can help overcome these challenges (Rosli, Sabri, & Takril, 2024). Clark and MacGillivray (2019) suggest that using multiple communication channels improves understanding and retention for all students, including those with disabilities. Offering sign language courses for lecturers is a proactive approach to creating an inclusive learning environment, as these courses will help to equip educators with the skills needed to communicate effectively with students who have hearing impairments.

Another critical strategy is the incorporation of assistive technologies and visual aids in classroom instruction. For students with hearing impairments, tools such as captioned videos, sign language interpreters, and visual cues can greatly enhance understanding and participation (Luckner & Bowen, 2006). The strategic use of technology not only supports the learning of students with disabilities but also fosters their independence and confidence in educational settings (Al-Azawei, Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016).

Emotional support and active listening are critical components of supporting students with disabilities, and creating opportunities for students to share their experiences and challenges in a safe and supportive environment is essential (Rosli, Sabri, & Takril, 2024). Lastly, ongoing professional development and reflective practices are essential for educators working with students with disabilities. Teachers must continuously upgrade their knowledge on inclusive pedagogies, disability awareness, and classroom accommodations (Forlin, 2010). By fostering a mindset of continuous improvement, educators can remain responsive to the evolving needs of students with disabilities and cultivate a more inclusive and effective teaching environment.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval

The investigation was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects. The ethical procedure number JKEUPM-2023-010 indicates that data collection started once ethical consent was obtained.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the challenges encountered and the strategies implemented by lecturers in the teaching of students with hearing disabilities in the hospitality program at higher education institutions in Malaysia. The researcher used a case study qualitative design to obtain new insights regarding the subjects. One of the reasons for selecting the case study method is that it is a crucial instrument to investigate a process and understand a specific phenomenon (Starman, 1997; Starman, 2013).

Sampling and informant selection criteria

This study employed the purposive sample approach. This approach primarily selects interviewees based on specific criteria to achieve the study's objectives. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight (8) lecturers from the hospitality program at the polytechnic and community colleges. The study only included lecturers from four higher educational institutions, namely Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic, Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic, and Selayang Community College, who teach students with hearing disabilities in the hospitality program. The lecturers involved in the teaching program included Certificates in Hotel and Catering, Basic Pastry, and Basic Culinary Arts.

Data collection

Since this study involved lecturers from higher learning institutions, a high level of collaboration from all stakeholders was required. Before conducting the data collection, permission was obtained from the Department of Polytechnic and Community College of the Ministry of Higher Education in Putrajaya, Malaysia. A list of lecturers who teach students with hearing disabilities from certificate courses in Basic Culinary, Basic Pastry, or Hotel and Catering at the Johor Bahru Polytechnic, Arau Polytechnic, Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic, and Selayang Community College was attained.

Semi-structured interview questions were developed consistently with predetermined questions to ensure uniformity of information collected. The questions were designed in an interactive way to bring out and develop a relaxing, friendly atmosphere, thus gaining high-quality information in the interview. With the assistance of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Department of Polytechnics and Community College to facilitate the interview process, data was gathered from eight (8) interviews that were conducted with polytechnic and community college lecturers from March 2023 until July 2023. The researcher reminded the lecturers that their participation was entirely voluntary, and they had the option to exit the interview at any point and refuse to answer any questions.

All information, including recordings and transcripts, was kept secure and confidential. A video recorder was utilized to record the interviews, and the interviewer also took notes to ensure that the conversation stayed on topic. The duration of each interview ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, with an average of approximately 45 minutes spent at the participants' workplace. This format not only allowed for a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences but also fostered an environment of trust, encouraging open dialogue. Participants often expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their insights in a supportive setting. The interview concludes after data saturation is attained. The interviews were set up so that the questions were asked in a way that followed the flow of the conversation rather than in a straight line.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Informants' profiles

Table 1 presents the characteristics of informants ($n = 8$) who engaged in this research. Among the eight, six were female lecturers and two were male teachers. The ages of the informants varied from 37 to 50 years. Regarding their educational qualifications, only two individuals have master's degrees, while the remaining six hold bachelor's degrees. All of the informants have more than ten years of work experience, with those with the most years having twenty-three. Three of the eight participants (37.5%) had presently taught at Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic, while two were attached to Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic, two to Ibrahim Sultan

Polytechnic, and one to Selayang Community College. All participants in this study were lecturers from three distinct programs, comprising the two-year certificate courses in Basic Culinary, Basic Pastry, and Hotel and Catering.

Table 1: Informants' Profile

Code	Gender	Age (Years)	Working experience (Years)	Higher Learning Institute	Program Taught
LTR1	Female	44	13	Selayang Community College	Certificate in Basic Pastry
LTR2	Female	46	23	Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering
LTR3	Male	37	12	Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering
LTR4	Female	43	12	Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering
LTR5	Female	50	16	Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic	Certificate in Basic Culinary
LTR6	Male	45	17	Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering
LTR7	Female	39	15	Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering
LTR8	Female	37	12	Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic	Certificate in Hotel and Catering

*Notes: Lecturer (LTR)

Challenges in Teaching Students with Hearing Disabilities

This section addresses Question 1, which examines the challenges educators face when teaching students with hearing disabilities. To explore these views, respondents were asked:

"During your teaching experience, what challenges have you faced while teaching students with hearing disabilities?"

Their responses were analyzed using inductive coding, identifying key themes that reflect their experiences and perspectives. Figure 1 shows the themes codes network on educators' challenges in teaching hearing-disabled youth. There are 15 codes produced, and four (4) themes portray them, including communication barrier, diverse learning needs, emotional and behavioral issues, and institutional and resource limitations.

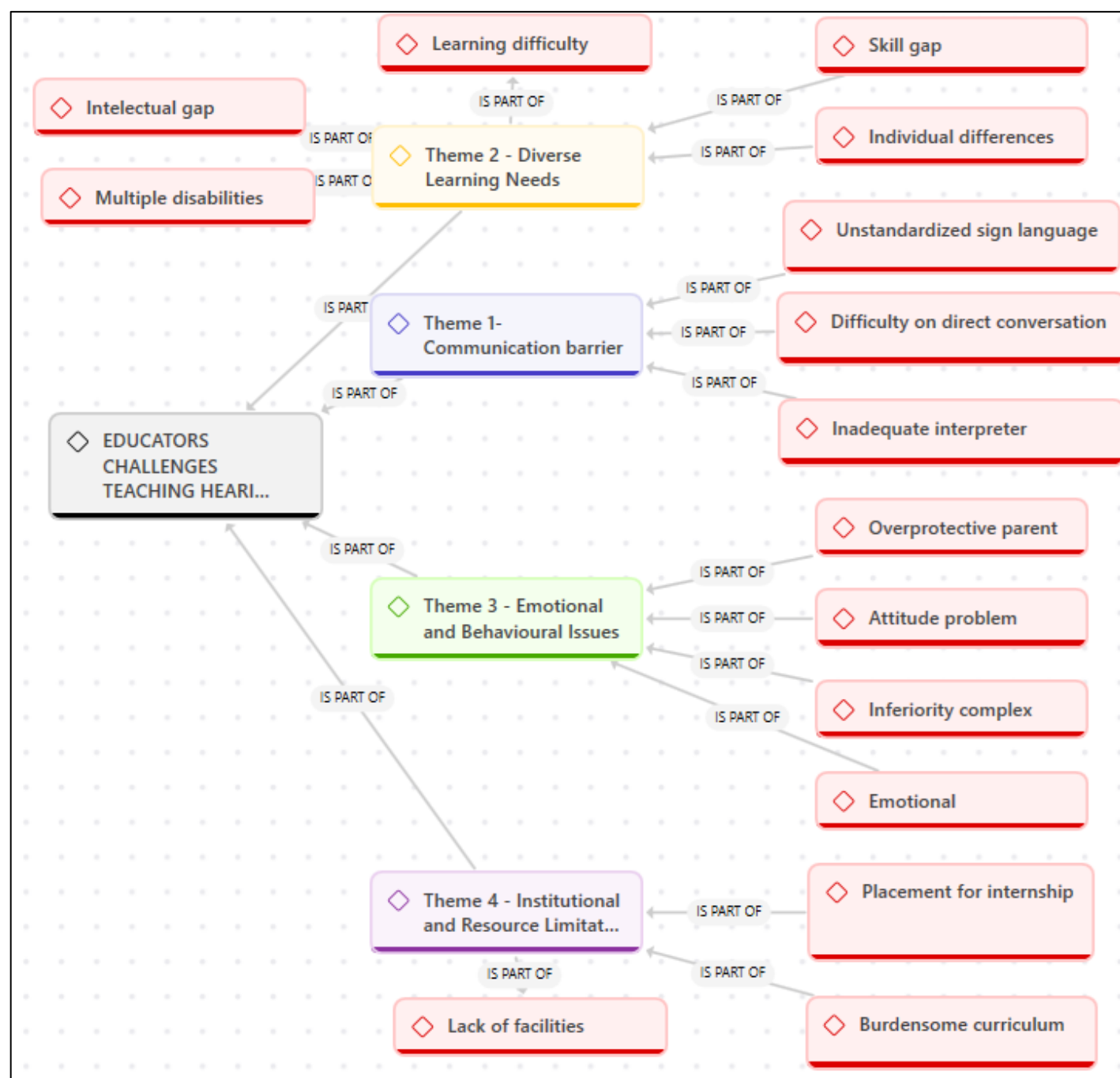
Theme 1: Communication barrier

Communication impediments are a significant challenge for educators when working with students who have hearing disabilities, frequently leading in misunderstandings (Rosli, Sabri, & Takril, 2024). The majority of the informants claimed that communication is the most challenging aspect of teaching hospitality students with hearing disabilities. These respondents emphasized the lack of proficiency in sign language among educators, the use of informal sign language by students, and the necessity of interpreters to facilitate effective direct interaction between individuals. Some of the responses are as follow:

"The first challenge is communication. I need to be proficient in sign language, but my skills in communicating using sign language are limited. To teach in the fields of culinary and pastry, we need more specific signs. Some of the polytechnic students also cannot communicate effectively. They don't use standard sign language but have their own way of signing." [LTR 3]

"My lack of proficiency in communicating in their language, it's quite difficult for me to understand their behavior and figure out how to tackle their problems." [LTR4]

Figure 1: Network Themes and Codes Generated Across Data Analysis on Educators' Challenges



Source: Authors Elaboration

"The challenge during teaching might be in terms of delivery. I'm also not yet an expert in sign language. So, my delivery requires the assistance of an interpreter." [LTR7]

Theme 2: Diverse Learning Needs

Another group of respondents ($n = 3$) emphasized the diverse learning needs of students with hearing disabilities. These respondents highlighted differences in intellectual ability, prior knowledge, and comprehension levels, which necessitate the implementation of individualized teaching approaches. Among the quotes from the participants are:

"In my opinion, their understanding is slow, so we need to make an effort to diversify teaching methods, such as simulations, demonstrations, role-playing, and group discussions. Students always need repetition to improve their memory of the topics being taught." [LTR3]

"Although I have been teaching special needs students for a long time, if the student has only hearing disabilities, there's no issue. But if the student also has learning disabilities, it's quite difficult." [LTR5]

"But as lecturers, it's difficult for us to understand these students because some of them don't know how to read or write. And some don't even know sign language. So, these students use their own form of sign language. However, there are only one or two students in such cases." [LTR8]

Theme 3: Emotional and Behavioral Issues

In order to remain emotionally stable in the face of difficult and unpleasant circumstances, it is essential to preserve emotional stability. A subset of respondents (n = 3) addressed the emotional and behavioral issues is the challenges faced by educators teaching students with hearing disabilities. These respondents noted issues such as heightened sensitivity, frustration, and difficulties in managing emotions, all of which can negatively affect the learning process. Their responses are:

"Another challenge is the emotional aspect of these special needs students. When we ask them to do many tasks or give them multiple instructions at once, they can easily become angry or frustrated. Some students are fine and have no problem when we give instructions. We try to shape them to become better so that they will be able to work well in the future." [LTR3]

"The problem with these special students during their practical training is that they prefer to work for a salary. Some of them are very fond of taking medical leave or skipping work." [LTR8]

"Um... those are the problems we'll always have to deal with when it comes to attitude and intelligence. A lot of these students with disabilities can't handle stress. The students are usually very emotional." [LTR1]

Theme 4: Institutional and Resource Limitations

Finally, result revealed that institutional and resource limitations as obstacle to effective teaching. This respondent highlighted issues such as outdated facilities, insufficient funding, and a lack of specialized training for lecturers as significant obstacles to supporting students with hearing disabilities. This aligns with the findings of research by Zin, Abdullah, Zabidi, & Othman (2023), which indicated that respondents voiced unhappiness with the management system for facilities for individuals with disabilities. Informer said:

"We have a subject on housekeeping. In housekeeping, for example, when ironing large items like bed sheets, we should be using a flatbed iron that can rotate. We have one here, but it's been broken for a long time, so the students don't get to experience that. Even if these students don't end up working in housekeeping, we, as lecturers, want them to have that experience." [LTR8]

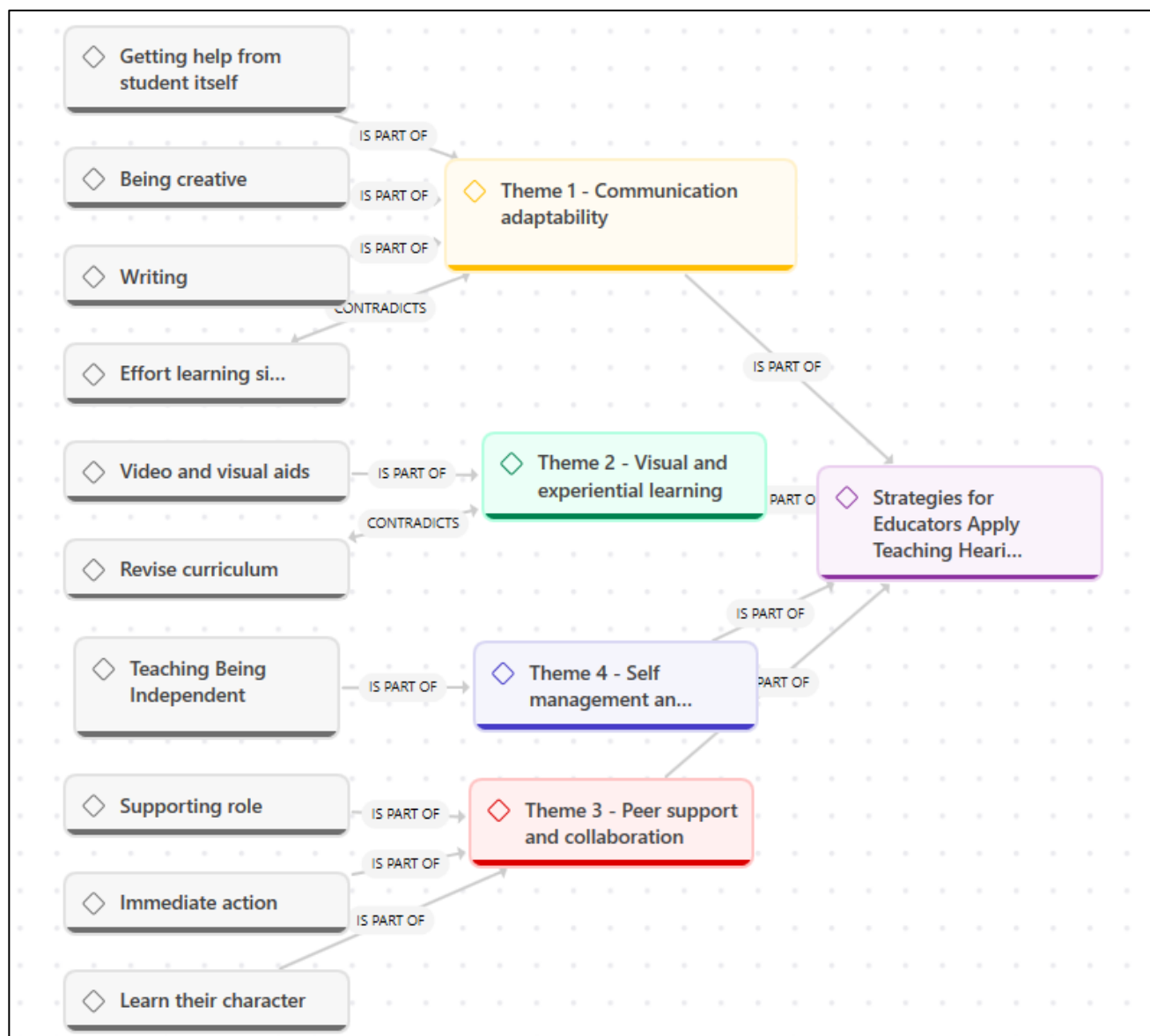
Strategies to Address Challenges in Teaching Students with Hearing Disabilities

This section addresses Question 2, which explores the strategies educators use to overcome the challenges of teaching students with hearing disabilities. Gaining insight into these approaches is essential for enhancing instructional practices and promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Figure 2 shows the themes and codes network educators' strategies apply in teaching disable youth. There are 10 codes generated, and four themes portray them, including communication adaptation, visual and hands-on learning, emotional and behavioral issues, and encouraging independence and self-management. In order to investigate these opinions, participants were asked:

"What strategies have you employed to address the challenges faced when teaching students with hearing disabilities?"

Inductive coding was used to examine their comments, revealing important themes that represent how they addressed specific student needs, modified their teaching strategies, and broke down barriers to communication. The findings are shown below.

Figure 2: Theme and Codes Network Educators' Strategies Apply in Teaching Disable Youth



Source: Authors Elaboration

Theme 1: Communication Adaptations

A significant number of respondents (n = 5) stressed the need to change the way we talk to each other so that we can better help students who have hearing problems. There were many ideas put forward, such as using written communication, visual tools, assistive technologies, and learning sign language to help both educators and students communicate more clearly and with more accessibility. Some of the responses are as follow:

“Usually, we will explain things in writing. But for the deaf-mute group, they have a slight issue with a limited vocabulary. So, we need to really understand what they are trying to ask or explain. For practical classes, such as in the kitchen, for example, when the oven finishes cooking, it will turn on a spinning light, similar to an ambulance siren, to indicate that the food is ready. In the kitchen, many mirrors have been installed on the walls. The purpose of these mirrors is to call their attention with a hand wave so they can see when they are being called, because they cannot hear.” [LTR1]

“For me, when it comes to communication issues, I need to take time to become more confident. Before that, in class, I will make use of our interpreter. We need to learn and pick things up quickly from the interpreter. And... maybe I use a lot of other methods, such as writing on the board, or when a student has a phone, they will type and show it to me. Sometimes, even using hand gestures myself, they can understand.” [LTR4]

"The steps I take are more about improving what I'm still not proficient in. I also push myself to use sign language, even though there are times when the signs I use might be wrong, but the students will correct me. From there, I learn... that's how I improve and develop my sign language skills." [LTR5]

"For the communication issue, I admit that I lack proficiency in sign language. So, what I do is write on the whiteboard or share slides. However, there are some students who have difficulty reading. Some read things backwards. To improve the skills of lecturers, workshops on sign language communication skills should be held. In addition, it's important to interact more with these special needs students. Use mobile phones as a communication tool. In class, use lip movements if there are difficulties in using sign language." [LTR6]

"For example, in my case, with communication issues, I feel that one of the key things is to learn on your own. Sometimes, I also watch videos. I didn't even remember the alphabet at first. Before each class, I would watch videos to remind myself how the alphabet is signed. Some letters I remember, others I forget. But Alhamdulillah, when we practice, it becomes easier." [LTR8]

Theme 2: Visual and Hands-On Learning

Another group of respondents (n = 2) emphasized the effectiveness of visual and hands-on learning approaches in educating students with hearing disabilities. They noted that practical demonstrations, visual materials such as pictures and videos, and interactive activities significantly enhance students' understanding, often proving more effective than traditional verbal instruction. Here are some examples of how respondents described this perspective:

"To overcome the communication challenge, I bought a CD containing sign language videos. For example, a sign language dictionary in Malay related to cooking. Inside, there are resources we can use as a guide for teaching. For assessments, I use a lot of videos and pictures in my teaching. I avoid using complex language when creating questions for special needs students to make it easier for them to understand. I try to keep the sentences as simple as possible." [LTR 3]

"For theory classes, in my PowerPoint notes, I simplify the language used. I use the most basic sentences. The sentences are straightforward, with no fancy words. If there are difficult terms, I will include pictures to help them understand. When I want to introduce equipment, they enjoy activities. For example, let's say there are 10 pieces of cutlery. I will arrange them and then test them. I will give them labels, and they will take those labels and label the items themselves." [LTR 8]

"When teaching these students practical lessons, even if they can do just a little bit, I already feel proud and happy. The students have a practical service class in semester 2 and an operation class in semester 3. When they can carry over and remember what they learned from semester 2 to semester 3, I feel like these students are really impressive. It's great that they can remember." [LTR 8]

Theme 3: Peer support and collaboration

The importance of peer support and collaboration will help students with disabilities keep their enthusiasm to study and finish assignments by providing a suitable and pleasant environment to learn. A subset of respondents (n=2) emphasized the role of peer support and collaborative learning in addressing the challenges faced by students with hearing disabilities. They highlighted the benefits of pairing students with varying skill levels and promoting group discussions, which foster mutual learning, enhance social interaction, and build a more inclusive classroom environment. A number of informants shared their thoughts:

"When I first started, I had no experience with these students. But because I had some experience in my surroundings, I had friends with deaf siblings, and cousins with disabilities, so I was already familiar with that environment. Even though at that time I didn't know sign language, at least I knew how my friends handled their deaf siblings. Little by little, as we got to know our students and their characters one by one, it actually became enjoyable. It's great when we get to know the students' characters. This one is like this, that one is like that. So, we learn how to treat each student, what methods we can use to assist them." [LTR 2]

Respondents highlighted the importance of being patience dealing with hearing disabilities students, boosting their self-esteem, improving skill development, and encouraging a feeling of belonging. Informer 3 said:

“In terms of patience, we as lecturers need to be more creative in handling the issues faced by special needs students. For those who are a bit slower, we pair them with students who grasp things more quickly, so they can learn together. If these students make a mistake or do something wrong, I will correct them with the help of an interpreter, so that the mistake is clear and they understand what they did wrong.”

Theme 4: Encouraging Independence and Self-Management

Finally, the last point highlighted strategies designed to promote independence and self-management among students with hearing disabilities. These strategies can empower students to take charge of their learning experience, fostering confidence and resilience. Instead of just focusing on the curriculum and tests, the goal of inclusive education is to make sure that all students feel like they are important parts of the university society and that their achievements are valued (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). The informers said:

“For me, RM3600 per semester is a lot. I always remind the students to save a little of that money for emergencies. Sometimes, they become victims as well, and they have to ask their parents for money. This is because we don’t want them to face financial issues later on. I always remind them, especially in their 4th semester, to save money for their graduation fees and to start saving for when they begin working later on.” [LTR4]

“I always remind my students that once they are here, they should try to complete their studies and earn their certificate. Sometimes, they forget that they are receiving an allowance, and they tend to just enjoy themselves. For me, RM3600 per semester is a lot. I always remind the students to save a little of that money for emergencies.” [LTR3]

The analysis of respondents’ strategies reveals a multifaceted approach to addressing the challenges of teaching students with hearing disabilities. Key strategies, such as communication adaptations, visual and hands-on learning, peer support, and the promotion of independence, all play critical roles in fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. By implementing these strategies, educators can more effectively meet the unique needs of students with hearing disabilities, empowering them to succeed both academically and personally. Continuous professional development and institutional support are essential to sustaining and enhancing these efforts.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed four main challenges faced by educators when teaching students with hearing disabilities: communication barriers, diverse learning needs, emotional and behavioural issues, and institutional limitations significantly impact the educational experience. Communication or verbal conversation emerged as the most significant concern among participants, particularly the lack of sign language proficiency among lecturers and the inconsistent use of formal sign language by students. Many educators relied on interpreters, visual aids, and written communication as alternatives but acknowledged that these methods have limitations. These barriers often led to misunderstandings in both theoretical and practical settings, limiting students’ full engagement in learning activities. Respondents emphasized the urgent need for more formal training in sign language and increased access to interpreters to facilitate clearer instruction and better support for students.

In addition to the communication gap, lecturers highlighted the broad spectrum of learning abilities and backgrounds among students with hearing disabilities. Educators observed that these students often required individualized teaching approaches due to differences in comprehension, prior knowledge, and cognitive development. While many students excelled in practical tasks, obstacle remained in theory-based subjects, particularly when instructional content was complex or abstract. Educators addressed these differences by simplifying language, using visual aids, and adopting hands-on teaching strategies that aligned with students’

strengths and learning preferences. This approach fostered greater student participation and helped bridge gaps in understanding.

Further compounding these challenges were emotional and behavioural issues, along with institutional constraints. Some educators noted that students with hearing disabilities often struggled with emotional regulation, becoming frustrated when faced with multiple instructions or when communication broke down. Communication gaps frequently led to misunderstandings, which in turn exacerbated these behavioural challenges. In addition, lecturers were unable to provide effective instruction due to a lack of specialized training and outmoded equipment, which was caused by restricted institutional resources. This finding is consistent with the previous study by Batista & García (2023), which indicates that communication, cognitive, and social problems posed challenges for educators teaching students with hearing disabilities.

Respondents requested institutional support, which includes upgrading teaching equipment, conducting regular workshops on inclusive education, and implementing policy improvements to enhance the overall learning environment for students with hearing disabilities. Additionally, they suggested providing captioning services for lectures and meetings, installing visual alarms and signalling devices, and ensuring that digital content and communication platforms are compatible with assistive technologies like screen readers. Such measures can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for graduates with hearing disabilities, enabling them to fully participate and succeed in both educational and professional settings.

Implications of the Study

Practically, the findings remind academic advisors, educators, and industry stakeholders to nurture career interest and self-efficacy through adaptive teaching strategies, structured internship programs, and inclusive policy frameworks. These elements enhance the educational experience and empower students to embrace their unique strengths. By fostering an inclusive atmosphere, educators can significantly impact students' confidence and career readiness.

Furthermore, collaboration between educational institutions and industry leaders can create tailored opportunities that align with the evolving needs of the workforce. This synergy prepares students for immediate job prospects and cultivates lifelong learning and adaptability. Ultimately, this holistic approach equips students with essential skills and encourages a mindset geared towards continuous personal and professional growth. As they navigate their careers, these empowered individuals are more likely to innovate and contribute positively to their communities.

As the landscape of careers continues to shift, it becomes increasingly essential for all parties involved to remain proactive in their support and engagement with students. By fostering a culture of support and innovation, the hospitality industry can become more accessible and welcoming for all individuals, regardless of their hearing abilities. Doing so not only enhances employability among students with hearing impairments but also contributes to achieving the SDGs through advocating for equal and inclusive quality education and employment.

In addition, hospitality schools, the Ministry of Education, and industry practitioners will work together to make sure that the curriculum design is suitable for everyone. The way hospitality education is planned needs to be changed so that it includes practices that help students with hearing disabilities have an easier time learning as well as meet the needs of the hospitality business. Incorporating inclusive strategies like showing lessons visually, using captioned multimedia, providing sign language support, and allowing students to do practical training are important for improving their skills and making sure they are ready for jobs in the hospitality industry. A customized curriculum should also include modules or a syllabus that are useful in the real world, like nonverbal communication in customer service, teamwork in a variety of settings, and applications through internships or industry simulations. These can help hearing-disabled students get better exposure in higher learning institutions and working industries.

Besides, hospitality institutions should strengthen collaborations with the Ministry of Human Resources and industry leaders to provide tailored training and placement programs. Employing graduates with hearing

disabilities, who have shown resilience and loyalty, can be a strategic response to ongoing labour shortages in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, employers' engagement with this talent pool can help cultivate a diverse, skilled, and committed workforce.

Conclusions

In Malaysia, the growing emphasis on inclusive education in higher learning institutions, including polytechnics and community colleges, has brought attention to the need for accommodating students with disabilities across all levels of the education system. It includes technical and vocational education and training. Among all the various forms of disabilities, hearing impairment poses unique challenges in the field that demand interpersonal and communication skills, such as in the hospitality industry.

In this context, educators are central to the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies that can bridge the communication gap and ensure meaningful learning experiences for students with hearing disabilities. By shedding light on these practices and challenges, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive education in vocational contexts and underscores the importance of supporting educators through adequate training, resources, and institutional commitment. It also highlights the critical role of creativity, empathy, and professional dedication in fostering an inclusive learning environment that prepares students with hearing disabilities for successful integration into the hospitality workforce.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The current study's scope is limited in several ways, which should be addressed in future research. These limitations include the sample size and the specific demographic characteristics of participants. Expanding the research to include a more diverse population could yield more comprehensive insights into the studied phenomena. As this present study focuses only on qualitative research design, it limits researchers from exploring alternative approaches that could provide statistical representation and the need for quantitative data.

Future research should conduct an exploratory mixed-method study to investigate the motivational factors that influence lecturers in teaching and preparing students with hearing disabilities for entering the workforce in Malaysia's hospitality industry. Such an approach would enrich the data collected and allow for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by both lecturers and students. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers can develop more robust strategies to enhance educational practices and support systems within this critical field.

Additionally, fostering collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, specifically the hospitality industry, will be essential in creating tailored programs by improving the curriculum to meet the specific needs of students with hearing disabilities.

This partnership can offer beneficial advice about the skills required in the workforce, ensuring that these students are well-equipped to thrive in their future careers. Hence, we recommend a study on educators' challenges teaching different types of disabilities, such as intellectual disability, as this present study solely depends on lecturers teaching hearing-disabled students who are enrolled in hospitality programs.

In line with special programs that have been offered at higher-learning institutions for youth with hearing disabilities to enhance their skills and meet the demands of working in various industries, the authors believe that the research may present some intriguing findings and new reasons for further research and discussion on the research to support quality of life and future careers for individuals with hearing and intellectual disabilities in survival strategies and family roles in the future. Moreover, with the expertise and skills given to this special youth group, they can be offered the opportunity to contribute to the country's economy by joining the workforce.

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