



## Exclusion within the inclusion practices of learners with hearing impairment in inclusive schools: A systematic review

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**Abstract**—This systematic review examines the exclusion within the inclusion practices of learners with hearing impairment (LwHI) in inclusive schools. Four databases, Google Scholar, PubMed, EBSCO-host, and Research Gate, were used. The study was guided by the 5W+1H framework for systematic review. The search was conducted in September 2024, and the searching strategies were Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) and proximity operators (SAME and NEAR). The eligibility of the studies was ensured using PRISMA guidelines, and the reviewed studies were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). The database search identified 108 studies; only 27 were eligible for the study after screening. The reviewed studies were analysed narratively, and no statistical data were presented in the results. Based on the established research questions, it was revealed that the availability and use of hearing assistive devices like hearing aids and cochlea implants, support services from audiologists and speech therapists, use of total communication, use of teaching aids, provision of extra time when teaching LwHI, the low pace of teaching and use of inclusive instructional and assessment strategies are some of the inclusion practices in inclusive schools. In contrast, negative attitudes towards LwHI, use of exclusive instructional and assessment strategies, rigid curriculum, poor seating arrangement, and inadequate skills in sign language are the critical exclusion practices that hinder the inclusion of LwHI in inclusive schools. This review highlights that exclusion practices exist because of the poor preparation of teachers to teach in inclusive schools and poor infrastructures in inclusive schools.

**Keywords:** Exclusion, Inclusion practices, Inclusive schools, Learners with hearing impairment, Disabilities

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### I. INTRODUCTION

THE history of inclusive education can be traced back to the early 1990s when international communities brought international statements, conventions, and agreements on the need to educate all learners regardless of their learning needs (Madhesh, 2019). For instance, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Actions on Special Needs Education (1994) was a strong debut of inclusive education. The Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 also intended to prepare schools to adjust themselves to fit the learning of all learners and not learners to fit themselves into schools. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006 cemented the importance of removing social barriers and all forms of discrimination, provisions for reasonable accommodation by ensuring accessible classrooms and assistive technologies, and formulation of policies to guide its implementations (Harber, 2017; Parhoon et al., 2014; Fina & Cera, 2015). At the UNESCO conference 1994, more than 300 participants representing 92 countries and about 25 international organisations laid a foundation. The conference agreed to define inclusion as a process of solving and reacting to the various needs of all learners so that they feel not excluded from the education system (Ardijana et al., 2014). Inclusion is expected to enhance social acceptance, cooperation, and participation in learning (Takala & Sume, 2018).

Hearing impairment means the inability to hear completely (deaf) or perceive little sound stimuli (hard of hearing). According to medical

viewpoints, a person is considered deaf if hearing acuity falls between 80 and 94.5 dB and speech is not perceptible to the ear, even with hearing aids (Marschark et al., 2022). A person is classified as hard of hearing if the hearing acuity falls between 20 and 34.9 dB, causing mild to severe hearing problems, which can be corrected by amplification (Oya et al., 2016). From the social perspective, LwHI are not disabled by their conditions but by reducing environmental factors (Maela, 2023). Disabling factors such as inaccessible environments, linguistic barriers, and inaccessible support services and materials pose learning challenges to LwHI in schools.

The primary concern about LwHI is the difficulty of communicating and socialising with others, which affects their learning in inclusive schools (Possi & Milinga, 2018; Onuigbo et al., 2020). Besides communication, including LwHI in inclusive schools can also be achieved by adapting instructional and assessment strategies and accommodating curriculum and school learning environments (Knoors & Marshark, 2015).

Despite the good intention of including LwHI in inclusive schools, studies have shown that there are exclusion practices within such schools. For instance, some teachers fear interacting with LwHI, believing they are not normal and are surrounded by misfortunes (Disability Africa, 2018). From the same perspective, some teachers compare the benefits of including LwHI to the normal ones by looking into the future outcomes of the learners. With these perspectives, they consider inclusion a waste of time and resources.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of 2015, Goal no 4, advocates for disability-sensitive learning environments to enhance inclusive education and, later, inclusive society (Elder et al., 2021).

Given the target of SDG, there is a clear need to understand the exclusion within inclusion practices in inclusive schools. This review, therefore, examines the practices that lead to the exclusion of learners from participation in inclusive schools.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study reviews exclusion within inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools. This review intends to inform policymakers, teachers, administrators, and researchers about the exclusionary practices within inclusive schools.

## III. METHODS

This study used a qualitative systematic review. As its name suggests, a systematic review collects, evaluates, integrates, and presents findings from several studies on a specific question or topic (Hussein, 2023). A systematic review uses existing research, sometimes called 'secondary research' (research on research). This systematic narrative review aims to collect, summarise, and evaluate the existing literature and narratively present quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative systematic reviews synthesise primary research narratively and are helpful for busy practitioners (Seers, 2015). Published systematic reviews prevent duplication of efforts as they give information on what has already been done in each area.

### Study protocol development and framework

This study is guided by Callahan's (2014) 5W+1H framework for systematic review. The framework considered the following factors for the review of previous studies: (i)Who (Author(s) searched for and collected the primary data, (ii)When was the data collected/year of publication, (iii)Where (country/context) the data collected from, (iv)How was the data obtained (data collection methods/instruments), (v)What were the results (findings), (vi)Why the article was selected (inclusion and exclusion criteria). The above aspects were also supported by Templier and Paré (2018), who stated that the 5W+1H framework for systematic review enhances the quality of the work and ensures clearness in the review process. The study ensured the studies' identification, screening, and eligibility using the Preferred Reporting Items and Systematic Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. Page et al. (2021), as cited by Randles and Finnegan (2023), report that the 2020 PRISMA statement helps the reviewers identify, screen, and include relevant studies about the methods used to identify, select, appraise, and synthesise studies.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research (SPIDER) guided the inclusion and exclusion criteria of studies reviewed in this study. Methley et al. (2014) assert that SPIDER has the most significant database specificity and is relevant for qualitative systematic reviews. Search categories emerged from the current study about exclusion within inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools. Table 1 shows the search categories and SPIDER headings.

| General terms                               | Specific terms                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Participants</b>                         | LwHI, Teachers                                                   |
| <b>Practices</b>                            | Inclusion and exclusion practices                                |
| <b>Data collection and analysis methods</b> | Methods used to collect and analyse data in the selected studies |
| <b>Experience of participants</b>           | Findings from participants                                       |
| <b>Approach</b>                             | Qualitative, Quantitative, mixed, and systematic review          |

### Data source and search strategies

A literature search was done using the electronic database and different search strategies. The databases used in this study were Google Scholar, PubMed, EBSCO-host, and Research Gate. The searching strategies were *Boolean operators* (AND, OR, and NOT) and *proximity operators* (SAME and NEAR). Keywords involved include "Hearing impaired AND inclusive practices", "exclusive practices AND LwHI, exclusive practices NEAR barriers to inclusion", "students with hearing impairment NEAR LwHI", "LwHI AND exclusion practices OR barriers to inclusion of LwHI, exclusion practices of LwHI in schools' SAME barriers to inclusion of LwHI in higher learning institutions. The researchers also used special needs education with subheadings about hearing impairment and inclusive education, inclusion and exclusion of hearing impaired, hearing impairment, and support services in inclusive education.

### Critical appraisal of studies

The reviewed Studies were critically appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). Long et al. (2020) pointed out that the CASP tool is user-friendly for novice qualitative systematic review researchers as it addresses the most crucial ten questions. CASP seek to check whether the reviewed studies have the following.

- Clear purpose of the research
- Relevance of the research approach
- Relevance of the research design
- Appropriateness of the recruitment strategy for participants
- Relevance of the data collection methods
- Researchers' reflexivity
- Consideration of ethical issues
- Rigor and trustworthiness of data and analysis
- Statements of the findings
- Contribution of the research to the body of knowledge

### Data screening and extraction

The reviewed articles, theses, and reports were recorded in a template with all the relevant information from each paper, focusing on the author(s), year of publication, country, research approach, data collection methods, participants, and results. Titles and abstracts were checked, and the duplicates were removed. For the remaining studies, full papers were reviewed for inclusion. The review was conducted from July to September 2024 from the named databases, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were considered. The database search identified 208 studies. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen the identified studies, 181 of which were found irrelevant. Only 27 studies were eligible for the systematic review as they met the inclusion criteria.

Table 1: Search categories and SPIDER headings

| Search Categories | SPIDER Headings |
|-------------------|-----------------|
|-------------------|-----------------|

Figure 1: PRISMA Diagram of the number of papers present at each stage of systematic review

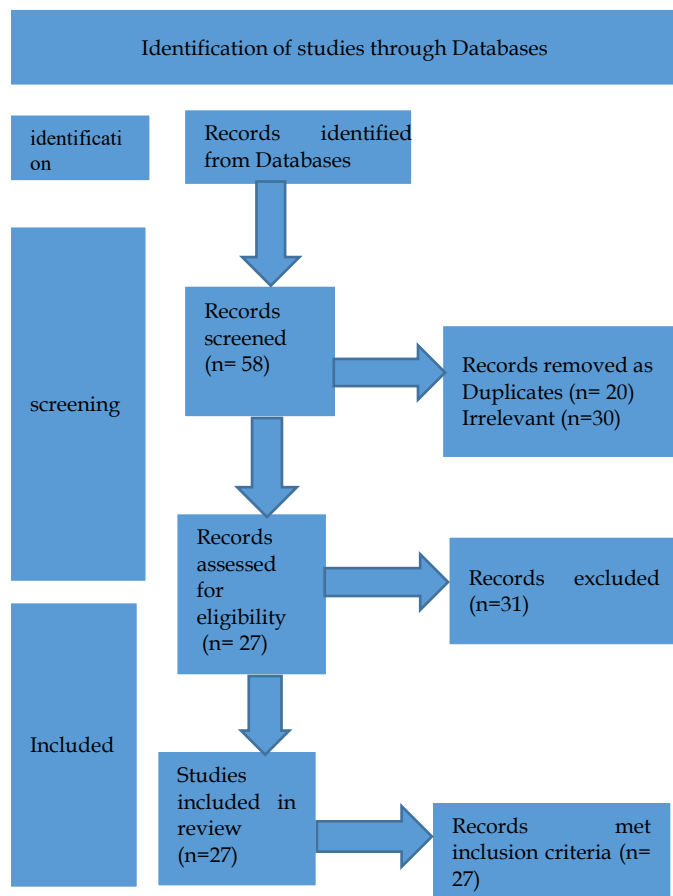


Figure 1: PRISMA Diagram of the number of papers present at each stage of the systematic review

Table 2: Summary of the Search Results

| Data Base      | Search results | Irrelevant papers | Relevant papers |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| EBSCO-host     | 15             | 12                | 03              |
| Google Scholar | 55             | 40                | 15              |
| Pub-Med        | 14             | 12                | 02              |
| Research Gate  | 24             | 17                | 07              |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>108</b>     | <b>81</b>         | <b>27</b>       |

#### IV. RESULTS

##### Sample characteristics

Twenty-seven (27) papers were eligible for inclusion. These papers followed qualitative, quantitative, systematic, and mixed approaches. Information was obtained from the selected studies' abstracts, discussions, and conclusions. Table 3 below shows the distribution of studies from different countries and their respective approaches.

Table 3: Summary of the sample studies

| Country      | No of Papers | %          | Methodology          |                       |                |                     |
|--------------|--------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
|              |              |            | Qualitative approach | Quantitative approach | Mixed approach | Systematic approach |
| Africa       | 13           | 48.2       | 9                    | 3                     | 1              | 0                   |
| Europe       | 3            | 11.1       | 1                    | 1                     | 1              | 0                   |
| USA          | 2            | 7.4        | 2                    | 0                     | 0              | 0                   |
| Asia         | 9            | 33.3       | 6                    | 1                     | 0              | 2                   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>27</b>    | <b>100</b> | <b>18</b>            | <b>5</b>              | <b>2</b>       | <b>2</b>            |

Table 3 shows that Africa has more studies on the exclusion and inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools (48.2%), and the United States has very few studies (7.4%). The findings show that 15 studies out of 27 were conducted qualitatively (Africa has 9, and Asia has 6).

##### Analysis and synthesis

This study reviewed quantitative, qualitative, mixed, and systematic studies related to the topic. Despite the differences in approaches, all studies were analysed narratively, and the results were not statistically analysed. Findings from each research question are presented in detail below.

##### Inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools

Inclusion in education implies that children learn together in the same classroom, using materials appropriate to their various needs and participating in the same lessons and recreations (Republic of Uganda, 2017). Republic of Uganda (2023) added that inclusion in education ensures that the systems and structures enable all learners to participate and benefit from all activities.

Several studies have been reviewed on the inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools. For instance, Afoh (2022) indicates that inclusion practices in inclusive schools happen when there is a constant supply and maintenance of hearing assistive devices, hearing aids, and cochlea implant services, the presence of trained specialist teachers to deal with LwHI, and support services from professionals like audiologists and speech therapists. David et al. (2021) add that training teachers on hearing impairment and inclusion contributes to including LwHI.

A qualitative study by Castillo (2020) upholds that inclusion practices for LwHI in schools require a broad spectrum of actors and that their implementation takes time. The study further reveals that training teachers, formulating a vibrant education policy that embraces inclusion, and constantly supplying and maintaining hearing assistive devices are good practices for LwHI in inclusive schools.

Mkongo (2019) points out that competency and the use of total communication favour the inclusion of LwHI in a school. Teachers and non-teaching staff are obliged to use sign language to communicate with those who are completely deaf, and both sign language and lip reading are required for those who are hard of hearing. This argument is further supported by Hiebert (2019), who states that in a class of both deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, total communication is significant because the deaf use sign language, and those with hard-of-hearing benefit from both sign language and lip reading.

Inclusion practices focus on enabling all learners to benefit from learning activities in a classroom. Hussein et al. (2023) complement this assertion by stating that inclusion is observed for LwHI when well-streamlined teaching and communication strategies favour inclusion. They also revealed that using sign language and lip reading improves the psychological wellbeing of LwHI as it enhances social inclusion and participation in the learning process.

Inclusion practices are also characterised by the availability of special teaching aids for LwHI, support services, positive attitudes of both teachers and hearing peers in the classroom, extra teaching time, the slow and reasonable pace of teaching, inclusive teaching and assessment strategies, proper sitting arrangement, and availability of the education policy to guide the implementation of inclusive education (Ojjo, 2024; Ndongwa, 2017; Mbugua, 2019; Sangoda, 2023). The seating arrangement is expected to be a semi-circle to enable LwHI to access information from the teacher or sign language interpreters.

The above studies indicate that inclusive practices are in line with General Comment No. 4(2016) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Article 24, on the right to inclusive education (UNICEF, 2019). The emphasis is on a whole system approach, a whole educational environment approach, a whole person approach, and respect for and value of diversity.

##### Exclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools

Exclusion for LwHI arises because of teachers and hearing peers' misconceptions, stereotypes, and folklore linking disabilities to punishment for past sins and misfortunes or witchcraft, which is the greatest obstacle to achieving social inclusion (Disability Africa, 2018). AlWadaani (2019) supported this assertion, indicating that teachers and hearing peers avoid interacting with LwHI, believing they are abnormal. Teachers are the curriculum implementation agents in

classrooms, and much is expected from them because of the training they undergo and the trust invested in them by both the government and the parents. Ojok (2014) suggests that teachers should not focus on the cost-benefit analysis when including learners with disabilities; instead, they should consider the human rights and social model aspects of inclusion.

The studies reviewed have revealed exclusion practices for LwHI in inclusive schools. For example, Abed (2023) reported that LwHI might be admitted in an inclusive class but not benefit from the educational services provided. This is because the rapid speed of and rapid signing hinders learners from perceiving information. It is also observed that hearing teachers shout at LwHI when they ask for help. This tendency arises from pressure on teachers caused by the requirement to complete the syllabus within a given time.

Communication is one of the aspects that accelerate inclusion and vice versa. Kigotho (2016) upheld that interpretation services in inclusive schools are a challenge because sign language interpreters are employed based on the ability to sign and not to be conversant with a subject matter. Some LwHI are excluded and do not benefit from the teaching process because of the large class sizes, which affects the visibility of the sign language interpreters, teachers, and teaching aids (Nimante, 2020).

The studies reviewed also indicate that Instructional and assessment strategies used by teachers in inclusive schools are identified as another reason for exclusion. Insufficient total communication and a lack of visible instructional materials may hinder effective inclusion and learning of LwHI (Khairuddin, 2018; Robert & Gerold, 2023).

Studies also demonstrate exclusion practices in inclusive schools because LwHI follow a centralised curriculum, yet schools lack support services such as audiologists and speech physiotherapists and have no vibrant education policies that embrace inclusion (Castillo, 2020; Khalid, 2021). In his study on an analysis of pre-service teachers' education for the inclusion of children with hearing impairment, Okwaput (2018) observes that teachers in inclusive schools are half-backed because their training is more of a theory delivered for two hours a week with only one month of teaching practice in a year. The syllabus for inclusion is also general and covers little about the inclusion of LwHI in classrooms. The study also observes that more weight is given to other course units than special needs and inclusive education course units.

Poor teacher preparation causes other challenges serendipitously because teachers were reported to be incompetent in using inclusive teaching and assessment strategies, sign language, and negative attitudes towards hearing impairment and inclusion (Susilawati et al., 2023; Ishrat, 2022).

Other studies reveal that hearing peers are also the source of exclusion practices in inclusive schools. For example, Goico (2023) points out that in the United States of America, negative attitudes from peers were demonstrated through bullying and insults. One can suggest that the hearing peers copy exclusionary practices from the hearing teachers who demonstrate negative attitudes, such as shouting at LwHI during lessons or not providing support to these learners during class activities.

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The literature review involved an extensive search of the available research concerning exclusion practices, including LwHI. The review was done extensively to align with the prior research questions: What are the inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools? What are the exclusionary practices of LwHI in inclusive schools? Using the Preferred Reporting Items and Systematic Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guideline, 27 studies met the criteria set by the researcher.

Concerning answering the first research question, it was observed that LwHI experienced some inclusion practices, which included supplying and using hearing assistive devices like hearing aids and cochlea implants and provision of support services such as audiology and speech therapy. It was also revealed that teachers teaching in

inclusive schools use total communication (sign language and lip reading), special teaching aids, and extra time when teaching LwHI. The teachers also used a low pace when teaching inclusive teaching and assessment strategies and organised the seating arrangement to enhance the inclusion of LwHI.

It was also noted that some exclusion practices were barriers to including LwHI in inclusive schools. Although the LwHI are enrolled in inclusive schools, they do not benefit from the available educational services due to negative attitudes of teachers towards LwHI and inclusion, lack of effective communication protocol between LwHI and teachers, use of exclusive instructional and assessment strategies, use of centralised curriculum which is not adapted for LwHI, poor sitting arrangement, and inappropriate instructional teaching materials. Inadequate teacher training led to exclusion due to the limited teacher training curriculum.

This review, therefore, shows an exclusion within the inclusion practices of LwHI in inclusive schools. The findings show that exclusion practices may be due to inadequate education system policy, infrastructure, and attitudinal factors. The review highlights that exclusion practices arise partly because of teachers' ill-preparedness. Therefore, governments and professionals must strive to work together to remove barriers to the education of LwHI in inclusive schools.

## VI. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest relevant to this review's content.

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