



Challenges of Special Education Teachers in Teaching Deaf Students: A Case Study in a Special School

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by special education teachers in teaching deaf students within inclusive educational settings. Children with hearing impairments require adaptive and individualized instructional approaches due to their limitations in verbal communication and language development. The objective of this research is to explore and identify the specific challenges encountered by a teacher at a special school (SLB Dharma Wanita Sumenep) and to understand the strategies used to address them. This study employs a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study approach, focusing on a single teacher as the research subject. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observations, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings reveal several key challenges, including communication barriers, limited learning media and instructional materials, lack of professional support, dependence on parental collaboration, limited facilities, and the need for individualized learning approaches. Communication difficulties emerge as the most dominant issue, requiring teachers to master sign language and adapt teaching strategies. In conclusion, despite various constraints, teachers demonstrate strong commitment and adaptability in supporting deaf students. The study highlights the importance of collaboration, adequate resources, and flexible pedagogical practices in achieving effective inclusive education.

Keywords: Deaf Students; Special Education; Teacher Challenges; Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

Every child with special needs (ABK) has unique and specific challenges in the learning process at school. These challenges may include physical, intellectual, emotional, and social aspects, which influence how they receive, understand, and respond to learning materials. Therefore, instruction for ABK cannot be equated with that for typically developing children. The limitations they experience require the implementation of flexible, adaptive, and individualized strategies and approaches. In this context, teachers are expected not only to be patient but also to be capable of designing instruction that aligns with the characteristics and needs of each child. Thus, it is essential for teachers to adjust their methods, media, and teaching styles to ensure that learning can take place effectively and inclusively for all students, including those with special needs. According to Nuryati (2022), children with special needs require specific

educational services tailored to their individual characteristics in order to optimally develop their human potential. This is in line with the view of Sul-tonah, Nurfadilah, Sari, Fahmy, and Masfia (2024), who emphasize that appropriate educational services will help children with special needs achieve maximum development in accordance with their abilities and needs.

Support for the importance of special education services is also emphasized in Article 5 Paragraph 1 of the National Education System Law, which states that education for children with special needs is intended for learners who experience difficulties in participating in the learning process due to physical, emotional, mental, or social impairments. In addition, these services are also provided for children who demonstrate exceptional intelligence or special talents. This provision highlights the responsibility of the education system to ensure that all learners, regardless of their conditions, have access to appropriate and equitable educational opportunities. This perspective is further reinforced by Andriani, Saputra, Sulisty, and Sari (2023), who argue that education must accommodate the diversity of learners so that every individual has equal rights to develop their potential. By recognizing and addressing the varied characteristics and needs of students, educational practices can become more inclusive and responsive. Such an approach not only promotes fairness but also supports the optimal development of each learner in accordance with their abilities and unique strengths.

The statement above emphasizes that children with special needs require educational services that are specifically designed, well-directed, and tailored to their individual characteristics in order to optimize the diverse potentials they may possess, including intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and psychological aspects. This is consistent with the provisions outlined in the National Education System Law, which states that special education is provided for learners who experience difficulties in participating in conventional learning processes due to physical, mental, emotional, or social factors. Furthermore, special education is also intended for children who demonstrate exceptional intellectual potential or special talents that require approaches different from those used for typical learners. Therefore, all children, whether they face challenges or possess exceptional abilities, are entitled to equal access to quality, fair, and equitable educational services, in accordance with the principles of inclusivity and justice within the national education system.

Every child has equal rights and obligations in accessing proper educational services, including children with hearing impairments or those who are deaf. They are an integral part of the national education system, which upholds the principle of inclusion as the foundation for providing fair and equitable education for all learners. This principle ensures that all children, including those with special needs, have equal access to educational facilities, supportive learning environments, and opportunities to develop their potential optimally. Through inclusive education, children with hearing impairments are given the opportunity to learn alongside their peers, actively participate in the learning process, and fulfill their rights and responsibilities in education in a comprehensive and dignified manner, as stipulated in applicable laws and regulations.

Children with hearing impairments are individuals who experience auditory disorders that directly affect their ability to communicate and process verbal information. This condition limits their ability to perceive speech sounds through

the sense of hearing, resulting in delayed language development, particularly in spoken language (Mar'atus Solihah, 2018; Vianti, 2021). Spoken language functions as the primary means of communication in everyday life, yet individuals with hearing impairments often face significant challenges in accessing and understanding messages delivered through oral or auditory channels. Nugrahani et al. (2023) explain that these difficulties arise from impairments in the hearing organs, which limit the ability to perceive sound effectively and necessitate the use of assistive devices or alternative communication methods to support interaction. In addition, hearing impairment is not a uniform condition but varies in severity, ranging from mild to moderate and severe levels, as noted by Satillah et al. (2024). These varying degrees of hearing loss influence how individuals communicate and learn, highlighting the need for appropriate support systems and adaptive strategies to ensure effective communication and meaningful participation in daily and educational contexts.

Children with hearing impairments encounter substantial barriers in verbal communication and spoken language development, which significantly affect their ability to access and process information in conventional classroom settings. These limitations often result in delays in language acquisition and difficulties in understanding abstract concepts delivered through auditory means. As a result, traditional teaching methods that rely heavily on oral instruction are less effective for these learners. To address this issue, educators must adopt specialized instructional approaches that emphasize visual, contextual, and interactive learning strategies. Such approaches are designed to bridge communication gaps and ensure that learning remains accessible, engaging, and meaningful for students with hearing impairments. Furthermore, differences in the degree of hearing loss require teachers to implement flexible and individualized teaching strategies. Each student may demonstrate different communication preferences, learning styles, and cognitive responses, making a uniform approach ineffective. Therefore, adaptive and inclusive teaching methods, such as the use of sign language, visual media, and individualized education programs, are essential to support their learning. By tailoring instruction to students' specific needs and abilities, educators can foster a more inclusive learning environment that promotes active participation, enhances comprehension, and supports the overall development of deaf learners.

Several studies have also highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in educating deaf students. Previous research conducted at SLB PGRI Bangkalan identified key challenges, including limited student communication skills, inadequate instructional media and teaching materials, as well as teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in teaching deaf learners. Proposed solutions include speech and hearing therapy, along with the provision of appropriate instructional media (Simorangkir & Harsiwi, 2024). Similarly, research at SLB PGRI Pademawu revealed comparable challenges, particularly the limited communication abilities of deaf students, which were addressed through the use of sign language and the adaptation of teaching methods (Putra & Harsiwi, 2024). These learning difficulties present significant challenges for teachers, including communication barriers, limited learning resources, insufficient professional support, dependence on parental collaboration, inadequate facilities, and the need to address individual learning differences.

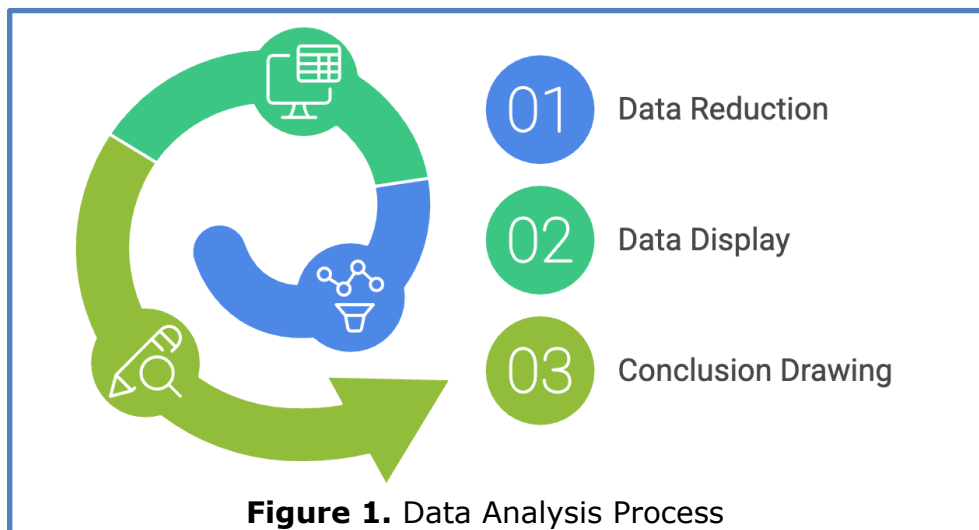
Teachers in Special Schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa/SLB) play a highly strategic and essential role in supporting the learning process of students with

special needs. They function not only as instructors but also as facilitators, mentors, and motivators in fostering students' academic as well as socio-emotional development. In the context of deaf students, communication barriers represent one of the most fundamental challenges that often hinder the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Due to their limitations in hearing and verbal communication, deaf students require specialized approaches that differ from those used with typical learners. Based on this background, the present study is aimed at exploring and identifying the various challenges faced by a teacher at SLB Dharma Wanita Sumenep in teaching deaf students, with the objective of providing an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the realities of classroom practice from the practitioner's perspective, as well as uncovering the strategies employed to overcome these challenges.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative method using an intrinsic case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena within a specific context. The intrinsic case study is selected because the focus of the research is not on generalizing findings to other cases, but rather on exploring the uniqueness and particular significance inherent in the case itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, this study aims to interpret and analyze the phenomenon based on the context and unique characteristics of the subject under investigation, as supported by Ardiansyah, Risnita, and Jailani (2023), as well as Prima, Sya, Nur, and Sya (n.d.). This research adopts an in-depth intrinsic case study approach, which focuses on a single case characterized by distinctive and unique features. The study is centered entirely on the case, including its setting, program, and other related elements (Labibah & Rahayu, 2024). An intrinsic case study is conducted due to the researcher's strong interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the particular case being examined. The selection of this case is not intended to represent broader issues, but rather because of its uniqueness and specific characteristics that make it worthy of further investigation. The primary objective of this approach is not to develop generalizable theories, but to explore the phenomenon based on intrinsic interest, although theoretical insights may still emerge (Prihatsanti, Suryanto, & Hendriani, 2018).

The subject of this study is a teacher working at a Special School (Sekolah Luar Biasa/SLB) Dharma Wanita Sumenep. Data were collected through interviews and direct observations of the subject to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the teaching practices implemented in the classroom. The interviews were conducted in a structured and in-depth manner to explore the teacher's experiences, perspectives, and instructional strategies in teaching students with special needs, particularly those with hearing impairments. Through this process, the researcher was able to capture detailed insights into the challenges faced and the approaches used to address them. In addition, observations were carried out to directly examine the teacher's behavior, interactions with students, and the overall learning activities within the school environment. This method allowed the researcher to gain real-time evidence of how instructional strategies were implemented in practice. The combination of interviews and observations enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the findings. As a result, the study provides a more holistic and accurate representation of the learning process experienced by students with hearing impairments.



Data analysis in this study was conducted through three systematic stages to ensure that the findings were accurate and meaningful. The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, simplifying, and focusing the collected data to highlight information that was most relevant to the research objectives. During this process, raw data obtained from interviews and observations were carefully reviewed, categorized, and refined to eliminate unnecessary or redundant information, allowing the researcher to concentrate on key themes related to the study. The second stage, data display, referred to organizing the reduced data into structured forms, such as descriptive narratives or visual representations, to facilitate interpretation. This step enabled the researcher to clearly identify patterns, relationships, and emerging themes within the data. The final stage, conclusion drawing, involved interpreting the organized data to formulate findings that directly address the research questions. This stage also included verifying the consistency of the data to ensure the credibility and validity of the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

The findings of this study are derived from in-depth interviews conducted with a teacher at SLB Dharma Wanita Sumenep. The data reveal various challenges encountered in teaching students with hearing impairments, particularly in relation to communication, instructional resources, and support systems. These challenges reflect the complex nature of inclusive education practices, where teachers are required to adapt their strategies to meet the diverse needs of students with special needs. To provide a clearer and more systematic understanding of the research findings, the identified challenges are summarized in the following table. The table presents key aspects of the difficulties faced by the teacher along with brief descriptions, allowing for easier interpretation and analysis of the issues emerging from the field data.

Tabel 1. Temuan Hasil wawancara dengan guru di SLB Dharma Wanita Sumenep

Research Findings	Description
Communication Barriers	Teachers are required to use sign language in the learning process for deaf students. Prior to teaching, the school equips teachers with a BISINDO (Indonesian Sign

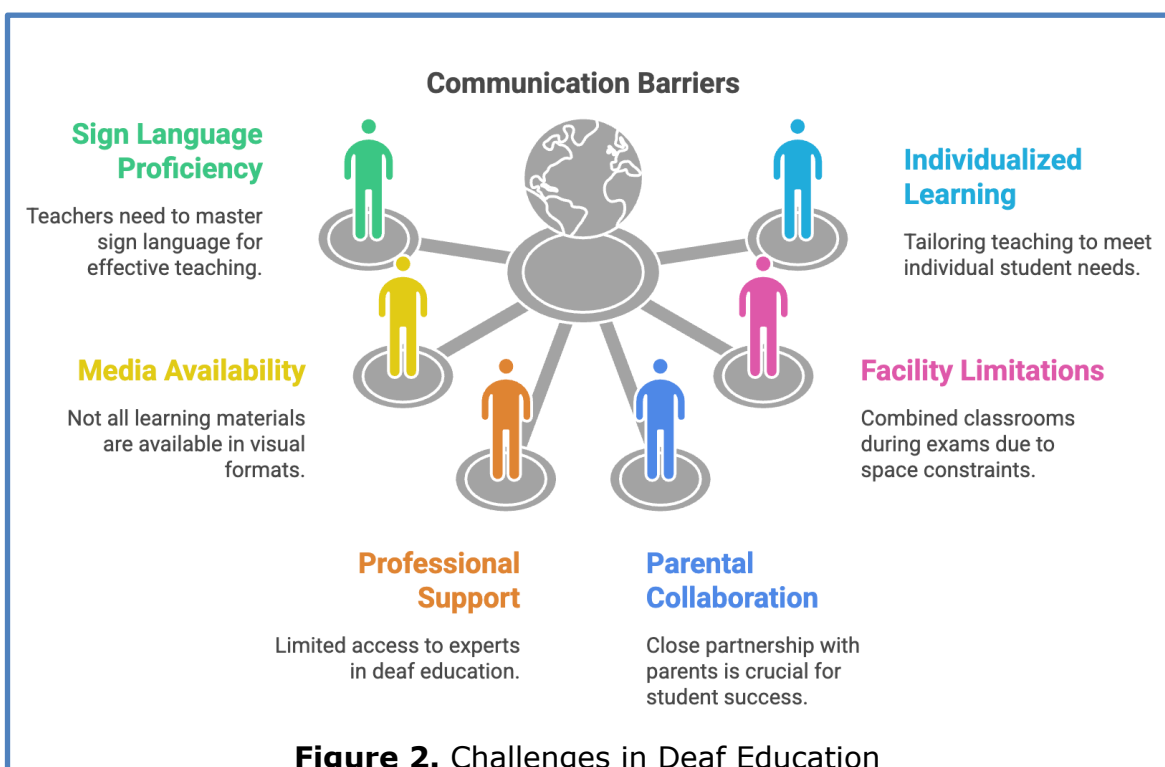
	Language) dictionary to support communication. BISINDO is predominantly used because it is considered easier than SIBI, although SIBI is occasionally introduced.
Limited Learning Media and Materials	Teachers utilize visual media such as images and videos with sign language. However, not all subjects are available in this format. For example, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is more challenging because it involves not only Indonesian but also Arabic language and hijaiyah letters, such as reading <i>Iqro'</i> .
Lack of Professional Support	In the Sumenep region, there is limited access to experts in deaf education. Professional support is mostly available only in larger cities such as Surabaya.
Dependence on Parental Collaboration	Teachers collaborate closely with parents in supporting deaf students, as parental involvement plays a crucial role, especially when professional resources are limited.
Limited Facilities and Resources	In daily learning, students are grouped based on their type of disability. However, during examinations, students are combined into one class due to limited classroom availability.
Need for Individualized Learning	Deaf students demonstrate specific talents, particularly in drawing and painting. Therefore, teaching approaches must be adapted to meet each student's individual needs and abilities.

Based on the findings presented in the table, communication barriers emerge as one of the most fundamental challenges in teaching deaf students. The necessity for teachers to master sign language, particularly BISINDO, highlights the importance of communication competence in ensuring effective learning. Without adequate communication skills, the delivery of instructional content becomes less optimal, which can hinder students' understanding and participation in the classroom. In addition, the limitation of learning media and teaching materials further complicates the instructional process. Although visual media such as images and sign language-based videos are utilized, not all subjects can be easily adapted into such formats. Subjects like Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which involve Arabic language and hijaiyah letters, require more specialized instructional approaches, making them more difficult for deaf students to comprehend.

Another significant issue is the lack of professional support and limited educational resources. The absence of experts in deaf education within the local area forces teachers to rely on their own competencies and available resources. This condition underscores the need for greater institutional support, including access to training, professional development, and collaboration with specialists to enhance teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the reliance on parental collaboration and the need for individualized learning approaches indicate that educating deaf students requires a holistic and flexible strategy. Parental involvement becomes crucial in supporting learning beyond the classroom, while individualized instruction ensures that each student's unique abilities and talents—such as skills in drawing and painting—can be optimally developed. These findings emphasize that inclusive education must be supported by

collaboration, adequate resources, and adaptive teaching practices to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

The findings of this study highlight several key challenges encountered by teachers in educating students with hearing impairments. These challenges are not only related to instructional practices but also involve broader aspects such as communication, resource availability, and institutional support. Understanding these interconnected issues is essential in order to develop effective and inclusive learning environments for deaf students. To provide a clearer visualization of these findings, the challenges identified from the interview data are illustrated in the following figure. The diagram presents the main issues in a structured and interconnected manner, allowing readers to easily grasp the complexity and relationships among the challenges faced in deaf education.



Based on the figure, communication barriers emerge as a central issue in the teaching of deaf students. Teachers are required to possess adequate sign language proficiency, particularly in BISINDO, to ensure effective interaction and knowledge transfer. Without strong communication skills, the learning process may become less effective, limiting students’ ability to fully engage with the material. Another important challenge is the limited availability of learning media and instructional materials. Although visual-based resources are commonly used, not all subjects can be easily adapted into visual formats. This limitation creates additional difficulties, especially for subjects that involve abstract or language-intensive content, requiring teachers to be more creative and adaptive in their teaching approaches.

The figure also highlights the lack of professional support and the dependence on parental collaboration. Limited access to experts in deaf education restricts teachers’ opportunities for professional development and guidance. As a result, collaboration with parents becomes a crucial component

in supporting students' learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, issues related to facility limitations and the need for individualized learning approaches emphasize the importance of flexibility in instructional design. Constraints such as limited classroom space can affect the learning environment, while the diverse abilities of deaf students require personalized teaching strategies. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving adequate resources, collaboration, and adaptive pedagogical practices.

3.2 Discussion

Communication Barriers

Another study by Zulpicha (2018) revealed that individuals who are deaf tend to prefer BISINDO over SIBI. This is because BISINDO is a sign language they have used naturally since birth, whereas SIBI follows the grammatical structure of Indonesian, which they do not fully understand (Satillah et al., 2024). Deaf children also still experience difficulties in understanding language structures (such as 5W+1H and Subject–Predicate–Object–Complement patterns), which often leads to miscommunication, particularly in written communication such as through the WhatsApp application. One of the main challenges faced by deaf children is the limitation in understanding and using language structures, both spoken and written. They often struggle to arrange words into correct and well-structured sentences. For example, many of them are not yet able to follow commonly used sentence patterns, such as Subject, Predicate, Object, and Complement (SPOC). This difficulty is caused by limited access to spoken language from an early age, which directly affects the overall development of their language abilities (Media & Kosa, n.d.).

This condition reflects limitations in early oral language development, as explained by Lev Vygotsky's theory on the importance of social-verbal interaction in language development. These limitations not only hinder communication but also impede the understanding of abstract concepts in learning (Dasar, Teori, Kognitif, & Tahapannya, 2025). The implications of these findings are quite significant. Teachers are not only required to be proficient in using sign language but must also understand how to simplify language structures so they are accessible to students. In addition, curricula and learning media need to be redesigned to align with the linguistic abilities of deaf children. Otherwise, the communication gap will continue to be a major barrier in their education.

Limitations of Learning Media and Materials

Visual media are essential for deaf children, as they are individuals with hearing impairments; therefore, visual media serve as the primary solution in the learning process. Many previous studies have also shown that visual media are effective in supporting the learning of deaf children. In this study, visual media remain the main solution, with the condition that such media must be mutually agreed upon and aligned with the children's level of understanding. The visual media used should represent children's daily lives, such as figures of parents (father and mother) and routine activities like waking up, bathing, getting dressed, putting on shoes, eating and drinking, and going to school. All of these activities need to be habituated and understood by the children (Inclusive, 2018). Barriers in learning are inevitable, not only for deaf children

but also for individuals with other disabilities. These obstacles may arise due to intellectual limitations, which can make the process of delivering learning materials more time-consuming. In the case of deaf learners, if the articulation or delivery is unclear, it may lead to misunderstandings (STO, May 9, 2023; Untuk, Tugas, & Pendidikan, 2023).

Referring to Neil Fleming's learning modality theory, deaf children belong to the group with a dominant visual learning style. Therefore, the use of images and videos is not merely supplementary but constitutes the primary pathway for accessing information. Fleming developed this concept of learning styles based on a theory proposed by Stirling in 1987 (Fleming et al, 2021). Initially, learning styles were classified into three main categories: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. However, these three categories were considered insufficient to fully explain the diversity of individual learning styles. Consequently, a fourth category—reading/writing—was introduced, forming the VARK Model (Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, Kinesthetic). The most significant distinction in this model lies in the reading/writing category, which has unique characteristics compared to the others (Fleming & Mills, 1992; Dasar et al., 2025).

Lack of Professional Support

Inclusive education applies the principle of check and balance, which means that educational institutions do not function in isolation. Instead, they involve multiple stakeholders who play important roles in supporting students' overall development. This approach emphasizes collaboration and shared responsibility in ensuring that every learner receives appropriate support. Within this framework, parents are recognized as key partners in the educational process. Their involvement is essential because they understand their children's needs, strengths, and challenges more deeply than anyone else. By maintaining active communication with schools, parents can help ensure that learning strategies are aligned with the child's individual condition. The community also plays a significant role in supporting inclusive education. School committees and local organizations can contribute by providing resources, feedback, and social support. Their participation helps create an environment that is more accepting and responsive to the needs of all students, including those with special needs. In addition to parents and the community, professional support is a crucial component of inclusive education. Experts such as counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers bring specialized knowledge that helps address the diverse needs of students. Their involvement ensures that students receive appropriate interventions and guidance.

Collaboration among these stakeholders allows for a more comprehensive understanding of each student's condition. Teachers are able to design learning strategies that are more effective because they are informed by insights from both families and professionals. This integrated approach improves the quality of education provided to students. Furthermore, inclusive education requires coordination between internal and external elements of the school system. Internal elements include teachers, school leaders, and administrative staff, while external elements consist of families and professional services. When these components work together, they create a strong support system for students. This collaborative effort is especially important for students with special needs. These students often require additional support to fully participate in the learning process. Through coordinated efforts, barriers to learning can be reduced,

allowing students to develop their abilities more effectively. Ultimately, the principle of check and balance in inclusive education ensures that responsibility is shared among all stakeholders. This shared responsibility fosters a more equitable and supportive learning environment. As a result, all students, particularly those with special needs, have greater opportunities to reach their full potential (Frans Laka Lazar, 2020).

Dependence on Parental Collaboration

The role of parents cannot be overlooked, because in addition to teachers, they also bear significant responsibility in supporting children's development. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development, the family is part of the microsystem, which has a direct and strong influence on a child's growth and development. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents becomes a key factor in helping children with hearing impairments achieve progress in both learning and social development. Parents who actively support children with hearing impairments can provide emotional support, assist with the use of hearing aids, and ensure that their children are involved in social activities. The use of sign language can also support children's cognitive development and strengthen emotional bonds. Ecological development theory explains that individual development is influenced by the surrounding environment. This environment can shape a person's behavior through interactions that occur among individuals. In other words, social relationships formed between individuals can influence and shape their respective behaviors. The surrounding environment also plays a role in illustrating and explaining the impact of these social interactions (Yuliawan & Taryatman, 2020).

Collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting children with hearing impairments is a crucial component in facilitating both learning processes and social development. Based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, family and school belong to the closest system to the child, namely the microsystem, which directly influences their development. When these two environments interact and work together, they form a strong and supportive mesosystem. Therefore, active parental involvement in the education of children with hearing impairments is essential to create a stable, responsive, and supportive environment.

Limitations of Facilities and Resources

Facilities and infrastructure play an important role in supporting the implementation of educational activities in schools. According to Soopiatin (2010), facilities include all equipment, materials, and furniture that are directly used during the learning process. These include school buildings, classrooms, learning media, as well as desks and chairs. This is further supported by OPI Andriani et al. (2023), who state that the availability of such facilities greatly contributes to creating a conducive learning environment. As discussed earlier, teachers are provided with sign language dictionaries when they begin working at the school. The purpose is to help new teachers learn to use sign language in the teaching and learning process with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, teachers still require a period of adaptation in their teaching practices, as interacting effectively with students with hearing impairments demands time, patience, and consistent effort.

The commitment of all school stakeholders must continue to be strengthened in order to achieve national education goals. One of the efforts implemented is to communicate learning skills through sign language proficiency. The author argues that sign language skills are highly important in ensuring the smooth implementation of inclusive education in schools and madrasahs. This additional competency is expected to serve as a bridge of communication between teachers and students, especially those with hearing impairments or deafness. Therefore, it is hoped that the process of knowledge acquisition in schools will become easier and yield more optimal outcomes (Perdana, Meiliawati, Rukmayadi, Syapean, & Ardiato, 2022).

Individualized Learning Needs

In special schools (SLB), learning plans are designed in accordance with the characteristics and challenges of each student. This approach is known as the Individualized Education Program (IEP), as every child has unique characteristics. The IEP is a teaching and learning program specifically designed for children with special needs (SEN), aiming to address the limitations of generalized service provision in the classroom. It also includes structured documentation that must be carefully prepared and implemented in stages. In practice, teachers are required to have the competence and skills to develop and implement effective IEPs. The theory of constructivism is one of the most widely recognized theories in the field of education. Before discussing it further, it is important to first understand what constructivism means. In general, constructivism refers to the process of constructing or building knowledge. In the context of educational philosophy, it is understood as an effort to build a cultured and modern way of life. Based on this perspective, constructivism emphasizes the process of developing knowledge and understanding through active engagement in learning activities. As a result, this theory encourages students to become more active participants, enabling their intellectual abilities to develop optimally.

Referring to constructivist theory, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) becomes an appropriate approach in special education settings (SLB), as it allows teachers to design learning experiences based on the specific needs, prior experiences, and unique potential of each student. The IEP positions learners as active subjects in the learning process, while teachers act as facilitators who guide students in accordance with their cognitive development and individual characteristics.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that teachers in special schools (SLB) face various challenges in teaching students with hearing impairments at SLB Dharma Wanita Sumenep. The main challenges include communication barriers due to students' limited understanding of sign language and language structures, the lack of appropriate learning media and instructional materials, insufficient professional support from special education experts in the region, as well as limited facilities and resources within the school. In addition, teachers rely heavily on collaboration with parents and are required to adapt their teaching approaches individually according to each student's needs. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to their role as educators, carrying out their responsibilities with patience and dedication. It should be noted that the findings of this study are based on data obtained from interviews and

observations involving a single teacher as the research subject. Therefore, these results are more in-depth and contextual, reflecting the specific experiences of that teacher.

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