



## Love Language: Effects of Sign Language Workshop Intervention on Social Isolation among Deaf Students

Rose Carmel Tabotabo<sup>1</sup>, April Joy Delina<sup>2</sup>, Kim Rotante<sup>3</sup>, Shendy Rabago<sup>4</sup>,  
Glenvi Amores<sup>5</sup>, Verdemerl Bacay\*<sup>6</sup>  
Philippine Normal University Visayas, Philippines

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### Abstract

Deaf students often face social isolation in public schools, where they are a small minority among predominantly hearing peers and educators. Research indicates this leads to feelings of loneliness, limited social skills, and diminished self-esteem, all of which can adversely impact their academic performance. Consequently, school administrators and teachers are legally encouraged to address this concern. Research also highlights the importance of student involvement, particularly that of student leaders, who can significantly influence their schoolmates. This study aimed to assess student leaders' ability to promote inclusivity and reduce isolation among deaf students. This research evaluated the effectiveness of a sign language workshop intervention among student leaders on minimizing the social isolation of hard-of-hearing students. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants for the study, consisting of 12 student leaders from SPED High School. These participants attended the workshop and completed a pretest-posttest using the Likert Scale to assess intervention effectiveness. The gathered data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to calculate averages and rank results. Initially, the student leaders exhibited an overall pretest mean score of 2.13, signaling a lack of confidence and skills in supporting deaf and hard-of-hearing peers. Post-workshop, their capacities markedly improved, with scores rising to 4.51 for enhancing inclusivity and 4.17 for reducing social isolation. These outcomes indicate that the training successfully boosted the student leaders' confidence and understanding, equipping them with vital skills to better advocate for and support deaf and hard-of-hearing peers. In conclusion, focused training programs or workshops are crucial for empowering student leaders to foster inclusivity and reduce social isolation.

**Keywords:** *Deaf/Hard-Of-Hearing, Social Isolation, Sign Language, Student Leaders*

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is the heart of leadership. For student leaders, the ability to engage effectively with all members of their school community—including those who are deaf or hard of hearing—is essential. In this context, sign language emerges as a critical but often overlooked form of nonverbal communication that can enhance empathy, inclusivity, and leadership effectiveness (Kusumawati, 2019; Riggio, 2024).

However, current curricula tend to emphasize verbal communication, often overlooking the value of nonverbal modalities like sign language (Makaroglu, 2022). This gap is especially relevant in inclusive education, where fostering communication across abilities is vital. Although inclusive education practices have expanded globally, they rarely focus on equipping student leaders with sign language competencies—a crucial skill for promoting accessibility and connection (Moradi et al., 2023).

Sign language is not a universal language; it consists of over 200 distinct systems worldwide, each with its own grammar and lexicon (Woll, 2019; Ferrara et al., 2022). This complexity presents both a challenge and an opportunity: understanding the visual-manual aspects of sign language can deepen students' appreciation of language diversity and nonverbal communication strategies. Research highlights the potential benefits of incorporating sign language in inclusive educational

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environments.

Integrating sign language fosters a supportive learning environment that helps deaf students develop a sense of belonging. A study by [Goswami et al. \(2020\)](#) found that students who learned sign language gained benefits such as awareness of nonverbal communication modes, mastery of basic Indian Sign Language, and a more positive view of sign languages.

Despite these benefits, current efforts to integrate sign language in schools often focus only on general inclusion or on students with hearing impairments ([Beal-Alvarez & Huston, 2014](#); [Alasim, 2018](#)). Few initiatives explicitly target student leaders—a group uniquely positioned to influence school culture and model inclusive behaviors.

In Cameroon, efforts to include students with hearing impairments in regular schools face challenges related to academic support, classroom placement, and sign language interpretation ([Bamu et al., 2017](#)). Repeated viewings of sign language materials have shown promise as an evidence-based practice for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in mainstream settings ([Beal-Alvarez & Huston, 2014](#)). However, challenges persist, such as inadequate adjustments in regular schools and communication barriers ([Bamu et al., 2017](#); [Alasim, 2018](#)).

To address these issues, strategies such as appropriate classroom placement and improved interaction between deaf/hard-of-hearing students and their hearing peers have been proposed ([Alasim, 2018](#)). In the SPED High School setting, there is limited training to empower student leaders and equip them with the skills needed to communicate inclusively with their peers, particularly through nonverbal modalities like sign language.

This study supports Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory, as the student leaders cultivated communication that goes beyond words—fostering understanding, inclusion, and empowerment. Also, it contributes to the intersection of leadership communication and inclusive education by highlighting sign language as a nonverbal modality that enhances Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and inclusive leadership competencies.

While traditional leadership models often prioritize verbal persuasion and decision-making, this study expands the scope of leadership communication to include visual-manual languages, thereby offering a more inclusive and multimodal framework. By integrating basic sign language training into student leadership development, the study proposes a shift from purely verbal leadership paradigms to models that account for diverse communication needs and styles.

Therefore, to address this gap, the researchers seek to achieve the following:

1. Deliver an engaging lecture for student leaders on the significance of inclusive communication and its impact on fostering empathy and understanding.
2. Conduct an interactive workshop to teach basic sign language skills
3. Facilitate practical exercises that allow student leaders to demonstrate their sign language proficiency through simulated real-life scenarios.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Hard-of-hearing/Deaf students

Hearing impairment denotes a disability that significantly limits a student's ability to hear and understand speech, adversely affecting their participation in classroom activities and their capacity to benefit from instruction ([Plack, 2018](#)). Students with hearing impairments face multiple challenges in inclusive educational settings, including difficulties understanding teachers' instructions, communicating effectively, and engaging in classroom tasks ([Kulhade & Kumar, 2022](#)). While earlier research suggested that some deaf and hard-of-hearing students may also have co-occurring learning disabilities, intensifying their struggles ([Bunch & Melnyk, 1989](#), as cited in [Kulhade & Kumar, 2022](#)), more recent studies emphasize how digital and inclusive practices can mitigate these difficulties.

For instance, although e-learning environments have been developed, they often fail to fully address the unique needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, highlighting a gap in accessibility (Hashim, as cited in [Dodandeniya et al., 2023](#)). This evolution from earlier diagnostic concerns to current technological and systemic responses reflects the broader framework of Inclusive Education Theory, which underscores systemic adaptation and individualized accommodation. Studies stress that providing appropriate support and accommodations is crucial to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in inclusive contexts ([Oreshkina & Safonova, 2022](#)).

### **Sign Language**

Sign language, defined as a “visual language” with its own grammar, structure, and vocabulary, is not merely an aid but a central pedagogical tool. Research has consistently shown its benefits, with early studies ([Lucas & Valli, 2004](#), as cited in [Clary, 2019](#)) confirming its role in communication, while more recent work emphasizes its contributions to literacy, classroom engagement, and self-confidence ([Fitriyani et al., 2024](#); [Silvestri & Hartman, 2022](#)).

Beyond communication, it reduces social isolation and fosters a sense of belonging in inclusive classrooms ([Ryan et al., 2021](#)). Thus, rather than being supplemental, sign language is situated within inclusive education as a structural equalizer, aligning with Universal Design for Learning by ensuring all learners can access content in multiple modalities. National and local policies, such as DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 and Republic Act No. 11650, further affirm its role in advancing inclusive educational systems.

### **Sign Language Workshop**

Workshops on sign language enhance both hearing and deaf students’ abilities to interact meaningfully. They foster cultural understanding, vocabulary growth, and confidence among hearing students ([Goswami et al., 2020](#); Daniels, 2000, as referenced in [Phan et al., 2020](#)), while simultaneously equipping deaf students with strategies to overcome barriers to participation ([Alasim, 2018](#)). Recent research also highlights workshops as collaborative interventions in which motivational and strategy-based approaches enhance learner engagement ([Mihret & Joshi, 2025](#)).

Additionally, professional contexts demonstrate their value; for example, medical students improved their cultural competence and patient communication after a sign language and deaf culture workshop ([Lapinski et al., 2015](#)). Collectively, these findings point to workshops not just as skill-based initiatives but as systemic strategies that align with Social Constructivist Theory by enabling interactive meaning-making and peer collaboration.

### **Student Leaders**

Student leadership plays a pivotal role in embedding an inclusive culture within schools. Leaders—both administrative and student—shape environments that recognize diversity and extend inclusion beyond the classroom ([Hajisoteriou & Sorkos, 2022](#); [Vassallo, 2024](#)). In higher education, barriers such as institutional and architectural limitations persist ([Mahlangu & Ntombela, 2021](#)).

The thematic consensus across recent studies is that leadership must move beyond policy compliance to embody inclusive values through vision-setting, collaboration, and peer-led initiatives ([Pazey & Combes, 2020](#)). Student leaders, in particular, act as agents of inclusive education theory by promoting peer solidarity and modeling inclusion in everyday interactions ([Blackman et al., 2019](#)).

### **Social Isolation Among Deaf Students**

Social isolation remains a recurring issue for deaf students in both mainstream and specialized settings. Earlier studies documented their limited peer networks and reduced opportunities for interaction (Kersting, 1997; Nunes et al., 2001), while contemporary research confirms these challenges persist, linking hearing loss with loneliness and reduced social opportunities (Edmondson & Howe, 2019).

These findings collectively reinforce Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which stresses that cognitive development depends heavily on social interaction. According to Nunes et al. (2001), as cited in Edmondson & Howe (2019), these issues underscore the necessity for proactive efforts to facilitate the social integration of deaf students, including helping hearing peers overcome communication barriers and fostering more positive attitudes toward their deaf classmates.

### **Inclusive Education in an Academic Setting**

Inclusive education functions as the overarching framework that integrates all the preceding themes. It emphasizes that learning is meaningful only when it accommodates the diverse needs of all learners, including deaf students. The literature illustrates a shift from diagnosing deficits to constructing inclusive systems through Universal Design for Learning and humanistic pedagogies, which enable educators to respond flexibly to diverse student needs.

Further caution that rigid institutional structures can unintentionally reproduce exclusion, underscoring the necessity for social constructivist approaches that prioritize peer interaction and collaborative meaning-making. Thus, the theoretical framework grounding this review draws on Inclusive Education Theory, Social Constructivism, Universal Design for Learning, and Social Learning Theory—providing a multidimensional lens through which the inclusion of deaf students can be understood and advanced.

### **Synthesis**

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students encounter major obstacles in inclusive classrooms, including communication barriers and the possibility of co-occurring learning disabilities. Research shows that these obstacles can impede their academic involvement and social integration (Alasim, 2018). Existing e-learning platforms often fail to meet users' needs, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced accessibility and personalized support (Rodriguez-Correa et al., 2023). These issues are best understood through the lens of inclusive education theory and social learning theory, which jointly emphasize equity, participation, and relational learning.

Research demonstrates that sign language is not merely a communication aid but a bridge to fuller engagement (Fitriyani et al., 2024; Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). The literature suggests that sign language workshops do more than improve communication—they enhance language acquisition, foster mutual understanding, and reduce social isolation, especially when paired with student leadership strategies that humanize and personalize inclusion. Workshops in sign language have shown benefits for both deaf and hearing students, fostering understanding and lessening social isolation (Lapinski et al., 2015; Karahan & Duyan, 2020).

Student leadership is key in cultivating inclusive schools. Research by Chen & Fitzgerald (2023) emphasizes that empowering student leaders to advocate for accessibility and encourage positive interactions is crucial. School leadership must actively create a warm and inclusive atmosphere, ensuring every student feels valued and supported (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). Proactive responses to social isolation, such as inclusive training and awareness initiatives, align with the tested principles of social integration and cognitive development (Edmondson & Howe, 2019; Hankins, 2015).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study:

1. Participation in sign language workshops improves communication confidence among hearing and deaf students.
2. Inclusive leadership activities involving student leaders reduce social isolation among deaf students.
3. Exposure to deaf culture and sign language improves hearing students' attitudes toward inclusion.

Establishing genuinely inclusive educational environments for deaf and hard-of-hearing students requires a multifaceted approach. This should include improved accessibility, thorough sign language education, empowering student leadership, and proactive measures to reduce social isolation. This issue extends beyond mere compliance; it is a vital step in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for everyone.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a Pre-Test-Post-Test One-Group Design. According to [Kothe et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Muhi and Dajang \(2023\)](#), the pre-test post-test one-group design is under a quasi-experimental design. This research design was selected because it enables measurement of changes in respondents' knowledge, behavior, and skills before and after the intervention. Thus, it evaluates the workshop's impact. Pre-Test-Post-Test One-Group Design is frequently employed in educational contexts, when control groups and random sampling are not practical ([Campbell & Stanley, 1963](#); [Shadish et al., 2002](#)).

On the contrary, the appropriateness of the research design for the educational intervention is compromised by the absence of a control group, which consequently prevents conclusive attribution of the observed improvements to the workshop. The research process included the following steps: (1) securing necessary approval and consent from both the principal and respondents, (2) conducting a pre-test, (3) delivering the sign language workshop, (4) conducting a post-test, and (5) data analysis.

### **Participants of the Study**

The respondents in this study were 12 student leaders of SPED High School enrolled in the 2024 -2025 academic year. The respondents were 2 student leaders from each grade level (Grades 7-12). These respondents were purposively selected because they hold positions of responsibility and influence, making them ideal candidates to champion inclusivity and improved communication practices throughout the school. The study used purposive sampling, in which participants were deliberately selected based on characteristics specified by the researchers ([Tabotabo et al., 2024](#); [Sulit et al., 2024](#)).

The sample size was deliberately restricted to 12 respondents, consisting of student leaders who met two key criteria: (1) a minimum of 3 years of leadership experience, and (2) a demonstrated commitment to learn Filipino Sign Language (FSL) to serve students, including those with special needs, inclusively. This targeted selection enabled the practical conduct of an intensive and immersive workshop with a manageable group. This focused sample size also enables more deliberate guidance throughout the intervention.

### **Research Locale**

The study was conducted at SPED High School at Purok Kalubihan, Barangay Daga, Cadiz City, Negros Occidental, Philippines.

## Research Instrument

The primary tool was a Likert-scale survey questionnaire supplemented by four open-ended questions. The instrument is composed of 10 items. This measures respondents' competence in communicating effectively and fostering inclusivity, particularly social inclusion, for students with special needs, before and after attending the sign language workshop (Tagarda, 2024).

The Likert scale is commonly used to evaluate perceptions and behaviors in educational and social research (Joshi et al., 2015). Sample items from the included instrument: 'I am confident in communicating effectively with deaf students.' 'I actively encourage social interaction between deaf and hearing students.' and 'I understand the importance of creating a supportive social environment for deaf students.'

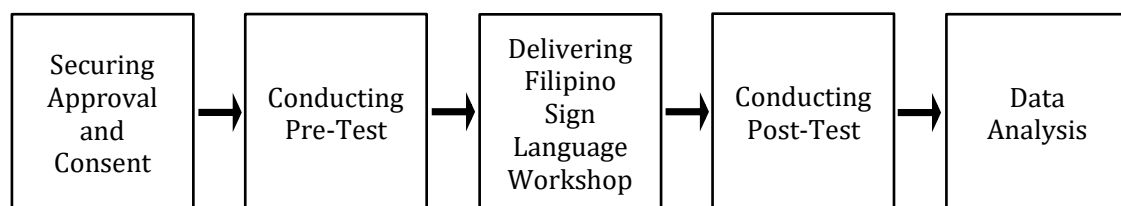
The open-ended questions collected qualitative data on the workshop's effectiveness from respondents. To ensure validity and reliability, the researchers sought help from experienced researchers specializing in language, education, and educational psychology. The questionnaire underwent content evaluation, and the suggestions and feedback were incorporated to refine the items and ensure clarity and alignment with the study's objectives.

Given the limited number of accepted respondents, which constrained pilot testing, the instrument's reliability was deliberately evaluated post-test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The analysis yielded an  $\alpha$  value  $> 0.70$ . This data indicates a satisfactory level of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

## Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers sent a letter to the SPED High School Principal, requesting approval for the workshop and the participation of student leaders from each grade level, along with the Student Government Officers. A pre-test was conducted to assess the respondents' initial knowledge, behaviors, and skills. Additionally, the Master Teacher in Hearing Impairment at SPED High School facilitated the intervention. The facilitator emphasizes developing Filipino Sign Language skills and fostering an inclusive environment.

The same research instrument was used to conduct a post-test after the intervention. Respondents' open-ended responses were collected to further enrich the quantitative results. This study was administered in accordance with ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and the rights of every respondent. The study's methodological process is illustrated in Figure 1, which clearly depicts the steps taken.



**Figure 1.** Flow Diagram of the Research Process

## Data Analysis

The researchers used Microsoft Excel to analyze the quantitative responses, calculating mean scores and rankings. The use of mean scores provided a clear indication of respondents' progress before and after the intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The results were categorized using descriptive scales, ranging from Low Extent to Very Great Extent.

Additionally, thematic analysis served as a flexible approach for evaluating qualitative responses from open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This provides in-depth quantitative

findings by contextualizing with respondents' personal insights. The tool is useful for organizing and analyzing data and has been utilized in various studies (Simaremare & Siregar, 2024).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondents Profile

The respondents were 12 student leaders from SPED High School, Grades 7–12, aged 13 to 18 years old. Of these, 7 were female, and 5 were male. Including these demographics provides context for the findings and clarifies that the results reflect the perspectives of young leaders directly engaged with deaf and hard-of-hearing peers.

**Table 1.** Fostering Inclusivity Among Students with Hearing Impairment

Questions	Rank	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I am confident in communicating effectively with deaf students.	6.3	1.75	Very Low Extent
2. I understand the challenges deaf students face in a mainstream school environment.	1	4.67	Very Great Extent
3. I actively seek opportunities to include deaf students in school activities.	2	2.33	Low Extent
4. I am comfortable using various communication methods ( <i>e.g., sign language</i> ) with deaf students.	4.5	1.83	Low Extent
5. I am aware of the different learning styles and needs of deaf students.	6.3	1.75	Very Low Extent
6. I can identify and address instances of discrimination or bullying against deaf students.	4.5	1.83	Low Extent
7. I feel equipped to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment for deaf students.	9.5	1.67	Very Low Extent
8. I am knowledgeable about deaf culture and its importance.	3	2	Low Extent
9. I can adapt my leadership style to meet the specific needs of deaf students.	9.5	1.67	Very Low Extent
10. I am comfortable interacting with deaf students.	6.3	1.75	Very Low Extent
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.13</b>	

**Table 2.** Reducing Social Isolation Among Students with Hearing Impairment

Questionnaire	Rank	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I can recognize signs of social isolation among deaf students.	5	2.42	Low Extent
2. I feel comfortable interacting with deaf students on a social level.	3.5	2.58	Low Extent
3. I actively encourage social interaction between deaf and hearing students.	3.5	2.58	Low Extent
4. I create opportunities for deaf students to build friendships and connections with their peers.	7.5	1.92	Low Extent
5. I am aware of the social barriers that deaf students may encounter.	1	4.25	Very Great Extent

6. I facilitate activities that promote a sense of belonging among deaf students.	7.5	1.92	Low Extent
7. I know how to support isolated students with hearing impairments.	10	1.67	Very Low Extent
8. I can advocate for the needs of socially isolated deaf students.	9	1.75	Very Low Extent
9. I am confident in my ability to help deaf students develop strong social networks.	6	2.25	Low Extent
10. I understand the importance of creating a positive and supportive social environment for deaf students.	2	4.08	Great Extent
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.54</b>	

Table 1 and 2 illustrates the pre-test findings on student leaders' competencies in fostering inclusivity and reducing social isolation among deaf students. While student leaders demonstrated awareness of the challenges faced by deaf students ( $M=4.67$ ) and the importance of creating supportive environments ( $M=4.08$ ), their actual skills and confidence in communication ( $M=1.75$ ), cultural awareness ( $M=2.00$ ), and advocacy ( $M=1.75$ ) were very low. This gap highlights that although leaders understand the barriers, they lack the tools to act on them. These findings point to a systemic gap in training: student leaders can recognize problems but initially lack the competencies to intervene effectively. This confirms the need for structured leadership workshops.

**Table 3.** Fostering Inclusivity Among Students with Hearing Impairment

Questionnaire	Rank	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I am confident in communicating effectively with deaf students.	8.5	4.33	Very Great Extent
2. I understand the challenges deaf students face in a mainstream school environment.	1.3	4.83	Very Great Extent
3. I actively seek opportunities to include deaf students in school activities.	10	3.67	Great Extent
4. I am comfortable using various communication methods (e.g., sign language, writing) with deaf students.	4.5	4.67	Very Great Extent
5. I am aware of the different learning styles and needs of deaf students.	1.3	4.83	Very Great Extent
6. I can identify and address instances of discrimination or bullying against deaf students.	6	4.5	Very Great Extent
7. I feel equipped to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment for deaf students.	7	4.42	Very Great Extent
8. I am knowledgeable about deaf culture and its importance.	4.5	4.67	Very Great Extent
9. I can adapt my teaching/leadership style to meet the specific needs of deaf students.	8.5	4.33	Very Great Extent
10. I am comfortable interacting with deaf students.	1.3	4.83	Very Great Extent
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.51</b>	

**Table 4.** Reducing Social Isolation Among Students with Hearing Impairment

Questionnaire	Rank	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I can recognize signs of social isolation among deaf students.	3.5	4.75	Very Great Extent
2. I feel comfortable interacting with deaf students on a social level.	3.5	4.75	Very Great Extent
3. I actively encourage social interaction between deaf and hearing students.	5	4.67	Very Great Extent
4. I create opportunities for deaf students to build friendships and connections with their peers.	6.5	4.58	Very Great Extent
5. I am aware of the social barriers that deaf students may encounter.	1	5	- Very Great Extent
6. I facilitate activities that promote a sense of belonging among deaf students.	8	4.42	Very Great Extent
7. I know how to support isolated students with hearing impairments.	10	4.17	Great Extent
8. I can advocate for the needs of socially isolated deaf students.	9	4.33	Very Great Extent
9. I am confident in my ability to help deaf students develop strong social networks.	6.5	4.58	Very Great Extent
10. I understand the importance of creating a positive and supportive social environment for deaf students.	2	4.92	Very Great Extent
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.17</b>	

Tables 3 and 4 present the outcomes of the post-workshop assessment. After the “Love Language” workshop, scores showed significant improvement: inclusivity rose from 2.13 (Low Extent) to 4.51 (Very Great Extent), and social isolation scores increased from 2.54 (Low Extent) to 4.17 (Very Great Extent). Confidence in communication improved dramatically ( $M=1.75 \rightarrow 4.33$ ), and awareness of social barriers reached the highest possible rating ( $M=5.00$ ). These improvements demonstrate that even brief interventions can rapidly strengthen both knowledge and practice, especially in communication skills and cultural sensitivity.

### Inferential Analysis

Since this was a pre-test/post-test design, paired t-tests were applied to the overall scores. Results showed statistically significant improvements for both fostering inclusivity and reducing social isolation ( $p < .001$ ), with large effect sizes (Cohen’s  $d > 0.8$ ). This confirms that the observed changes were not due to chance but reflect meaningful gains from the workshop. Furthermore, the following 4 open-ended questions were also included in the questionnaire to gain verbal data from the participants regarding the effectiveness of the “Love Language” workshop:

1. How did the workshop improve your communication with deaf students?
2. What specific strategies or techniques did you learn in the workshop that you can now use to include deaf students in school activities and social events actively?
3. How did the workshop enhance your understanding of the unique challenges and experiences faced by deaf students in a hearing-dominant environment?
4. Considering all aspects of the workshop, what do you believe was its most significant contribution to your ability to foster inclusivity and reduce social isolation among deaf students?

Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, and the following are the major themes that emerged:

1. Improved Communication through Sign Language – *“The workshop improved my communication with deaf and hard-of-hearing students by teaching me basic greetings and phrases.”*
2. Heightened Awareness of Deaf Culture and Daily Challenges – *“I realized the daily struggles of my deaf classmates, and learning about deaf culture helps me connect better as a leader.”*
3. Commitment to Inclusion – *“Now I know how to align our activities to the needs of deaf peers, so they will feel included.”*
4. Breaking Communication Barriers – *“Learning even simple sign language makes me feel more confident and opens doors to inclusivity.”*

These themes show that the workshop enhanced not just technical skills but also empathy and a commitment to leadership. Taking everything into account, the findings confirm that sign language workshops can substantially improve both attitudes and practical competencies of student leaders. This aligns with [Lapinski et al. \(2015\)](#), who found that workshops enhanced cultural competence and communication, and with [Ryan et al. \(2021\)](#), who emphasized the role of sign language in reducing social isolation. However, advocacy skills (M=4.33) and direct support for socially isolated students (M=4.17) remained slightly weaker than other areas. This echoes [Mihret & Joshi \(2025\)](#), who argued that while short interventions build awareness, sustained programs are needed to strengthen advocacy.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Love Language: Sign Language Workshop in enhancing the ability of hearing student leaders to mitigate and break the boundaries of social isolation of deaf students in SPED High School. The intervention aimed to address communication barriers between hearing and deaf students by introducing nonverbal communication strategies, specifically basic sign language.

The findings support all three research objectives. First, the engaging lecture on inclusive communication enhanced participants' awareness of the social and emotional dimensions of communication, fostering empathy and a stronger commitment to inclusive practices. Second, the interactive workshop successfully taught basic sign language, as evidenced by the marked improvement in post-assessment scores and observed proficiency. Third, through practical exercises and real-life scenario simulations, student leaders demonstrated and applied their new skills, showing increased confidence and the ability to engage with deaf peers in meaningful ways.

This improvement suggests that targeted interventions, such as the "Love Language" workshop, can effectively equip student leaders with the necessary tools to bridge communication gaps and promote a more inclusive environment. The study also highlights the critical role of nonverbal communication, particularly sign language, in fostering empathy and understanding between hearing and deaf students, and addresses the existing educational gap in curricula that often overlook these vital skills.

This advances the Servant Leadership Theory of Robert Greenleaf, in which student leaders developed communication that is not limited to spoken language but also to understanding, including, and empowering. Future curricula should consider embedding sign language and nonverbal communication strategies to ensure that leadership training is inclusive, empathetic, and responsive to diverse communication needs.

## LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the small sample size—restricted to a select group of student leaders from SPED High School—limits the generalizability of the results. With such a narrow participant pool, it is difficult to determine whether the outcomes observed would be replicated in other school contexts, age groups, or cultural settings. Larger, more diverse samples are needed to strengthen the external validity of the findings.

Second, the limited time allocated for the seminar and workshop may have affected both the depth of content delivery and the participants' ability to internalize and retain the information. While the short intervention showed promising outcomes, it may not have provided sufficient time for skill mastery or long-term behavioral change. Extended interventions with follow-up sessions could offer more accurate insights into the sustained impact of sign language training.

Third, there is a potential for social desirability bias in self-reported surveys and post-workshop evaluations. Participants may have been inclined to provide answers that reflect positively on their attitudes and behaviors—particularly in a context emphasizing inclusion and leadership—rather than expressing their genuine perceptions or limitations. This bias may have inflated the perceived effectiveness of the intervention.

These limitations suggest that while the results are promising, caution should be exercised in applying them broadly. Future studies should incorporate more diverse populations, longitudinal assessments, and triangulated data sources (e.g., peer evaluations, observational data) to enhance reliability and validity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable steps are recommended to enhance inclusive communication and leadership practices in schools, particularly the integration of sign language training into student development programs.

### **For Schools and School Administrators**

1. Integrate basic sign language training into student leadership programs such as student council training, peer mentoring initiatives, or homeroom officer orientations. This promotes inclusive leadership and ensures student leaders can effectively engage with deaf or hard-of-hearing peers.
2. Incorporate sign language awareness weeks or inclusive communication campaigns within the school calendar to normalize the use of nonverbal communication and raise awareness among the broader student population.
3. Collaborate with Deaf community members or interpreters as resource persons for workshops and events, to ensure authentic learning experiences and cultural competence.
4. Include sign language workshops in school-based in-service training (INSET) programs to encourage participation from both teaching and non-teaching staff, thereby creating a more inclusive school environment beyond the student body.

### **For Teachers and Curriculum Developers**

1. Embed sign language instruction in values education, social studies, or health classes, especially at the junior high level, where communication and social skills are emphasized.
2. Use co-curricular activities (e.g., performing arts, clubs, student assemblies) as platforms to reinforce inclusive communication practices and to provide hands-on opportunities for using sign language in real-life contexts.
3. Develop teaching materials that reflect diversity in communication, such as visual aids with sign language translations, inclusive posters, and student handbooks featuring basic signs.

**For Policymakers and Education Authorities (DepEd, CHED, Local Governments)**

1. Mandate the inclusion of basic sign language modules in student leadership development programs and teacher education curricula, in line with DepEd (Department of Education) Order No. 44, s. 2021 regarding mainstreaming students with disabilities in regular classrooms and the Republic Act No. 11650, referred to as the "Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act".
2. Allocate funding for inclusive communication training in public schools, including resources for sign language workshops, materials, and partnerships with sign language interpreters or Deaf associations.
3. Develop national or regional toolkits to guide schools on implementing inclusive leadership practices, including communication strategies for engaging with students with disabilities.

**For Future Researchers**

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of sign language training on student leadership behaviors and school culture.
2. Expand studies to elementary and tertiary levels to assess developmental appropriateness and cross-level transfer of inclusive communication competencies.
3. Investigate how sign language training affects peer relationships, academic performance, and social integration of both hearing and deaf students in mainstream classrooms.

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