

Resilience and Empowerment: A Case Study of a Hearing-Impaired Learner's Journey in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education for deaf learners continues to face challenges in communication, instruction, and social participation. This study explored the lived experiences of a deaf learner in teacher education, focusing on the adversities encountered, coping mechanisms employed, and factors contributing to resilience and empowerment in an inclusive learning environment. Using a qualitative single case study design and guided by Resilience Theory, data were gathered from one hearing-impaired learner and a teacher as key informant. Findings revealed that communication barriers, instructional limitations, and social isolation hindered academic participation. Despite these challenges, the learner demonstrated resilience through adaptive communication strategies, technology use, and support from teachers and peers. The study further showed that empowerment is a shared process shaped by collaborative support systems and inclusive practices. Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening sign language training for teachers, improving inclusive instructional strategies, and establishing structured peer support programs to enhance the educational experiences of deaf learners.

Keywords: deaf learner, resilience, communication barriers, coping mechanisms, Mati City, Philippines

I. Introduction

The Problem and Its Scope

Inclusive education for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners had become a global concern as nations strived to uphold the principles of equality, access, and participation in education (Ainscow, 2020). Globally, many experienced communication barriers in classrooms that relied heavily on spoken language, limited access to interpreters, and a shortage of teachers trained in sign language and inclusive pedagogy. The World Health Organization (2023) noted that millions of deaf individuals remained excluded from quality education due to inadequate support systems and social stigma. Similarly, improving educational outcomes for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners requires instruction that is responsive to their language and communication needs, as well as teachers who are equipped with evidence-based instructional practices (Hartman *et al.*, 2023). They argued

that accessible curricula and specialized instructional approaches are essential for promoting meaningful participation and academic success among deaf learners.

The educational journey of deaf learners in teacher education and higher education programs remains challenging even in contexts where inclusive education is widely promoted. Studies have shown that deaf learners often encounter communication barriers, limited access to instructional support, and difficulties in fully participating in academic and social activities. For instance, deaf students in higher education frequently rely on sign language interpreters, captioning services, note-taking assistance, and other accessibility accommodations to access classroom instruction and participate effectively in academic activities (Alsalamah, 2020). Similarly, Moriña (2024) reported that students with disabilities in higher education, including Deaf learners, benefit from institutional commitment to inclusive teaching, accessible communication, and supportive peer relationships, which contribute to successful academic participation and professional development. Furthermore, Herrera Batista and Sejas García (2023) highlighted that deaf students in higher education continue to face communicative and social barriers that affect their learning experiences and sense of belonging. These studies suggest that the journey of deaf learners in teacher education is shaped not only by individual determination but also by the availability of inclusive practices, accessible communication, and supportive learning environments that foster resilience and success.

In the Philippines, while significant strides had been made toward inclusive education, learners with hearing impairment continued to face numerous struggles in both basic and higher education. The enactment of Republic Act No. 11106, the Filipino Sign Language (FSL) Act of 2018, and policies such as DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, and CHED Memorandum Order No. 52, s. 2016, affirmed the right of deaf students to quality and accessible education. In Mati City, some institutions had shown commitment to inclusivity through activities such as the “Orientation and Awareness on Communication and Handling Peers with Visual and Hearing Impairments”. Despite these efforts, learners with hearing impairment still encountered communication barriers, social isolation, and limited institutional support, which often challenged their persistence and confidence in pursuing higher education.

Learners with hearing impairment continue to face challenges in higher education that require genuine attention and individualized support to ensure equitable learning opportunities. Without such support, their educational needs may remain insufficiently addressed. At the time this study was initiated, no study had been conducted at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU) that specifically explored the experiences of deaf learners. Therefore, this research served as the first institutional initiative to examine and understand their journey toward resilience and empowerment in teacher education.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to various stakeholders in the field of education, particularly deaf learners, teachers, administrators, and policymakers. For deaf learners, the findings provide meaningful insights into how a hearing-impaired learner developed resilience and empowerment while navigating the challenges of teacher education, which may inspire confidence, self-advocacy, and persistence in their own academic journey. For teachers and administrators, the study offers valuable implications for improving inclusive instructional strategies, communication accessibility, and support systems that respond to the unique needs of deaf students in higher education. For policymakers and educational institutions, the results may serve as a basis for strengthening the implementation of inclusive education policies such as the Filipino Sign Language Act (Republic Act 11106) and for enhancing programs that promote equitable learning opportunities for learners with disabilities.

In relation to global development goals, this study is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Beyond access to education, the study highlights the importance of addressing the lived experiences of deaf learners in teacher education by recognizing both institutional support and individual resilience as key factors in educational success. It emphasizes that quality education for learners with hearing impairment is not only achieved through policies and accommodations but also through inclusive practices that foster belonging, participation, and empowerment. In this way, the study contributes to the broader goal of building an inclusive

educational system where all learners, regardless of disability, are given the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Research Questions

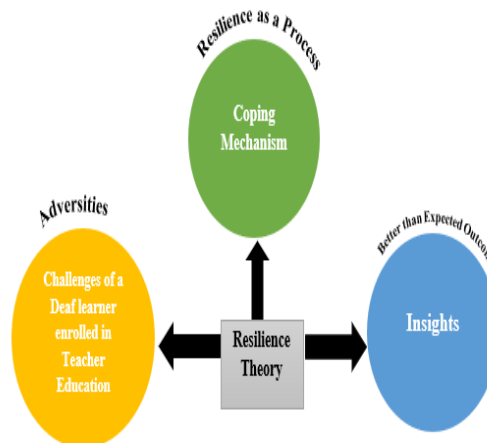
To understand the lived experiences of the hearing-impaired learner enrolled in the teacher education program, this study explored the challenges, coping mechanism and insight focusing on how resilience and empowerment are developed amid the challenges of inclusive education. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges does the hearing-impaired learner encounter in pursuing teacher education within an inclusive academic environment?
2. How does the hearing-impaired learner cope with these challenges to develop resilience and empowerment?
3. What insights can be drawn from the experiences of a hearing-impaired that may contribute to promoting inclusivity and support for deaf learners in higher education?

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on the Resilience Theory by Dr. Ann Masten (2001), which explains how individuals adapt, recover, and thrive amid adversity through both internal strengths and external support systems. Resilience is viewed as a dynamic process of self-regulation that enables learners to maintain competence despite academic and emotional challenges (Imhof et al., 2024). For students with disabilities, resilience is strengthened through supportive and inclusive environments that recognize individual needs and promote empowerment (Mawila, 2023). Moreover, educational institutions play a critical role in fostering resilience by implementing inclusive practices and responsive teaching strategies that enhance learners' sense of belonging and self-efficacy (de los Reyes *et al.*, 2022). In this study, the theory is relevant in understanding how a deaf learner in teacher education develops coping mechanisms and empowerment while navigating communication barriers and accessibility limitations. It frames the learner's lived experience as a transformative process where challenges become opportunities for growth, agency, and empowerment within an inclusive educational environment.

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive visual summary of the relationships between these lens as explored in the study.



Methodology

To establish the credibility of this study, this chapter presents the methods employed, including the research design, study locale, sample and sampling, data-gathering technique, and data analysis. I also explain how I adhered to the study's trustworthiness requirements.

Research Design

I employed a qualitative Single Case Study design to explore deeply the lived experiences of a learner with hearing impairment enrolled in a teacher education program at one of the higher education institutions in Mati City. A qualitative case study was particularly suitable for examining complex phenomena in their real-life context, as it enables researchers to generate rich, contextualized insights into participants' experiences and the processes through which resilience and empowerment are developed and enacted (Grenier, 2023). Furthermore, recent methodological literature emphasizes that the case study approach enables researchers to investigate bounded systems holistically, providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena while capturing participants' perspectives within their real-life contexts through multiple sources of evidence (Pokharel et al., 2024). This design supported the aim of the study to uncover how institutional factors, personal coping mechanisms, and social interactions converged to shape the resilience and empowerment journey of a deaf learner.

Locale of the Study

I conducted the study at one of the higher education institutions in Mati City, Davao Oriental. It is a public higher education institution committed to providing accessible and inclusive learning environments. The Faculty of Teacher Education offered various programs, including Special Needs Education, where inclusive education and accessibility were emphasized. This setting provided an appropriate context for examining how institutional practices supported a deaf learner's educational journey.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with firsthand experience relevant to the study, making it appropriate for qualitative case study research (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Dahal et al., 2024). The primary participant was a 24-year-old learner with hearing impairment enrolled in the Bachelor of Special Needs Education program under the Faculty of Teacher Education. The participant was selected based on direct experience with the academic and social challenges of inclusive education and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. To enhance the credibility of the findings, faculty members and one classmate were also purposively selected as key informants for data triangulation. This sampling approach ensured the collection of rich, relevant, and context-specific data on resilience and empowerment among deaf learners in teacher education.

Data Gathering Technique

Data were collected using a validated semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions on resilience, coping, and empowerment. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) of Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC), followed by approval from Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU). The participant and key informants provided informed consent prior to data collection. A qualified sign language interpreter facilitated communication by translating the participant's American Sign Language (ASL) responses into spoken English. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, supplemented with field notes, and verified through member checking to ensure the accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Yin's (2018) case study analytical strategy, which involves organizing, examining, and interpreting qualitative data to develop meaningful conclusions. First, the interview transcripts were carefully organized and prepared for analysis. Second, I performed a thorough reading of the data to become familiar with the content and identify significant statements related to the participant's experiences. Third, I conducted pattern matching by comparing emerging data patterns with the concepts of Resilience Theory, particularly focusing on adversity, coping mechanisms, and empowerment. Fourth, I developed explanations by linking the identified patterns to the research questions and theoretical framework to understand how the participant navigated challenges in the teacher education program. Finally, I refined and interpreted the findings to ensure that they accurately reflected the participant's lived experiences. This process followed Yin's structured approach to qualitative case study analysis, ensuring rigor, coherence, and depth in interpreting the data (Yin, 2018).

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985)—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—were employed. Credibility was established through member checking, whereby the participant reviewed and verified the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation, participants' understanding of the study's purpose and procedures, protection of privacy and confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, consistent with contemporary ethical standards in qualitative research (Potthoff et al., 2023). Dependability was maintained by keeping a comprehensive audit trail documenting all methodological decisions, research procedures, and analytical processes. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling to ensure that the findings reflected the participant's lived experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions or biases. Finally, transferability was achieved by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and findings, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the results to similar educational settings.

Throughout the conduct of the study, ethical principles were strictly observed. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected by assigning pseudonyms and securely storing all research records. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All data were used solely for academic purposes and handled in accordance with the ethical standards governing qualitative research involving human participants.

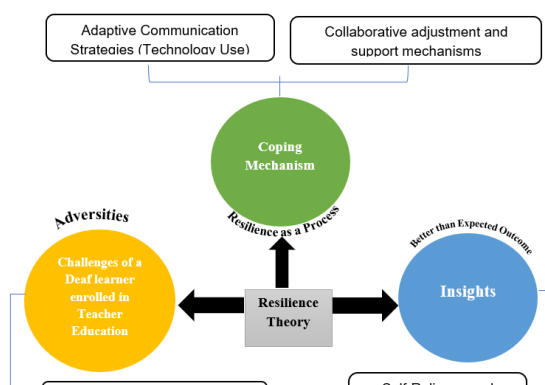
III. Results

The succeeding narrations are the results of my study. I presented them in such a way that they illuminate the questions which I raised in this research. I also consider this presentation as a foundation for my discussions, and for framing the implications and future directions.

In this section, I do not simply report findings but I unfold lived realities. Each theme is not merely a category, but a story shaped by silence, struggle, adaptation, and growth. Through these narratives, the voice of the deaf learner emerges not always through sound, but through experience.

Figure 2

The Modified Research Paradigm



Theme 1. Deaf Learner Adversities

This theme captures the various challenges James encountered while pursuing teacher education within an inclusive academic environment. His experiences reveal that communication barriers, instructional limitations, and social interaction difficulties were interconnected rather than isolated concerns. Together, these adversities influenced not only his academic participation but also his sense of belonging within the classroom. Despite these obstacles, the findings demonstrate how these challenges became the context through which resilience gradually developed.

Sub-theme 1.1 Communication Barriers in Inclusive Education

Communication Barriers in Inclusive Education emerged as one of the most significant challenges encountered by James while pursuing teacher education in an inclusive academic environment. The findings revealed that communication difficulties extended beyond the inability to exchange information; they affected classroom participation, comprehension of lessons, and social interaction. The absence of a shared communication system, particularly proficiency in sign language among teachers and classmates, created barriers that limited meaningful engagement in both academic and interpersonal contexts.

James described communication as the primary challenge he experienced throughout his teacher education journey. He shared:

One of the greatest challenges I experienced in teacher education was communication. It was very difficult to communicate with my teachers and classmates because most of them did not know sign language. - James/Participant

James's response demonstrates that communication was the foundation of many of the difficulties he encountered in the inclusive classroom. His statement suggests that the absence of a common language restricted his ability to express ideas, ask questions, and actively participate in classroom discussions. Rather than being an isolated communication issue, this barrier affected his access to learning opportunities and his sense of inclusion within the academic environment. The findings indicate that effective communication is essential for meaningful participation, particularly for Deaf learners whose primary mode of interaction differs from that of the majority of hearing students.

This finding was reinforced by Teacher Nora, who immediately identified communication as the first challenge she observed after James enrolled in college. She stated:

Okay so, amm.. the first the challenge no or mga challenges that I saw from James when he enrolled in college is the first. unang-una is the communication (Okay, so... the first challenge that I observed from James when he enrolled in college is, first of all, communication.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's response corroborates James's experience by confirming that communication barriers were evident from the beginning of his college education. Her observation indicates that these difficulties were not only perceived by the participant but were also recognized by educators responsible for facilitating his learning. This suggests that communication challenges influenced classroom instruction and teacher-student interaction, making it difficult to establish the reciprocal communication necessary for effective teaching and learning. A similar perspective was shared by one of James's classmates, Jes, who explained:

Ahmm..isa sa mga challenges jud na nakita nako kay James maam kay communication jud like kami na mga classmates niya, nay mga part sa among conversations dili mi kasabot dayun sa iyang mga sign tungod kay paspas ra pud siya mo sign maam niya dili pud ing.ana sa iya ka wide na among nahibal.an sa sign language. And the same sad sa amo maam kung naa mi iingon sa iya need pa namo e write maam or e sign namo pero e make sure sa namo kung tama ba among e sign maam. (One of the challenges I observed with James was communication. As his classmates, there were times when we could not immediately understand his signs because he signed very fast, and our knowledge of sign language was not as extensive as his. Likewise, when we wanted to tell him something, we needed to write it down or sign it, while making sure that our signs were correct.) -Jes/KI2

Jes's account provides an important peer perspective by demonstrating that communication barriers were experienced not only by James but also by his hearing classmates. Unlike the teacher's perspective, which emphasized instructional challenges, Jes illustrated how communication difficulties affected everyday peer interactions inside the classroom. Her response suggests that both James and his classmates continuously adjusted their communication strategies to understand one another, whether through writing, slower signing, or verifying the accuracy of signs. This finding indicates that communication barriers in inclusive education are reciprocal rather than one-sided, requiring active participation and adaptation from both Deaf and hearing learners.

Sub-theme 1.2 Instructional and Training gaps in Inclusion

Instructional and Training Gaps in Inclusion describe the challenges arising from limited teacher preparation and the lack of specialized instructional strategies for Deaf learners within the inclusive classroom. The findings revealed that although teachers demonstrated commitment to supporting James, they encountered difficulties in delivering instruction because of limited proficiency in sign language and insufficient preparation for teaching Deaf students. Consequently, communication barriers extended beyond classroom interaction and affected the delivery of instruction, explanation of complex concepts, and overall learning process. James described his classroom learning experiences by stating:

My teacher only uses PPT and sometimes when I ask, they write their explanation and I will read it. - James/Participant

James's response indicates that instruction relied primarily on visual presentations and written explanations to facilitate communication. Although these strategies enabled him to access classroom information, they also demonstrate that instructional adaptations were limited to immediate accommodations rather than comprehensive inclusive teaching practices. His account suggests that written communication became an alternative means of instruction because teachers were unable to consistently communicate through sign language, thereby influencing the depth of classroom interaction and learning.

Teacher Nora further explained the instructional challenges experienced in teaching James:

though we are a special education teacher but then again we are not trained on how to use sign language in communication to those students with hearing impairment no siguro naa lang mi nahibal.an na mga simple or basic na mga signs but then again dili siya kuan jud na everytime we communicate and everytime na magklase mi and especially those words or kanang mga topics na very technical nga need jud siya og exact na sign niya dili pud mi pwede magpataka og sign mao jud na siya ang una Nakita nako na challenge ni james naa jud communication barriers ghaon between the teacher and the students and also james in his or her classmates. (Although we are Special Education teachers, we are still not formally trained in using sign language to communicate effectively with students with hearing impairment. We may know some simple or basic signs, but they are not enough for everyday communication or classroom instruction. This becomes even more challenging when discussing highly technical terms or lesson topics that require the exact and appropriate signs. We cannot simply invent or guess the signs because that may lead to misunderstanding. That was the first challenge I observed with James—there were still communication barriers between the teacher and the student, as well as between James and his classmates.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's account highlights that instructional challenges were not caused by a lack of willingness to support James but by limitations in professional preparation and communication competence. Although teachers possessed backgrounds in special education, she acknowledged that they had not received sufficient training in sign language to effectively teach Deaf learners, particularly when explaining complex or technical concepts. This finding suggests that successful inclusion requires not only inclusive policies but also continuous professional development that equips teachers with the competencies necessary to address the diverse communication needs of Deaf students.

Jes also observed how James responded whenever instructional explanations became difficult to understand. She shared:

makita nako sa iya maam nga if dili jud siya kasabot, mangutana jud siya sa amo or kay teacher bahala ipa write lang niya ang explanation maam. (I noticed that whenever he really does not understand something, he is not hesitant to ask either us or the teacher. Even if the explanation has to be written down, he is willing to do that just so he can understand the lesson.) -Jes/ KI2

Jes's response provides an important peer perspective on how instructional barriers were managed within the classroom. She observed that James consistently sought clarification whenever he experienced difficulty understanding the lesson, regardless of whether the explanation was provided by the teacher or his classmates. Rather than remaining passive, James actively initiated communication by requesting written explanations to ensure his understanding of the lesson. This behavior demonstrates that he assumed an active role in his own learning despite the instructional limitations present in the inclusive classroom. His willingness to seek clarification also reflects resilience through self-advocacy and a strong commitment to academic success.

Sub-theme 1.3 Social interaction difficulties

Social Interaction Difficulties describe the interpersonal challenges James encountered while building relationships and participating in classroom interactions within an inclusive educational environment. The findings revealed that communication barriers extended beyond academic instruction and influenced peer relationships, social participation, and James's sense of belonging. Limited shared communication between James and his hearing classmates reduced opportunities for spontaneous interaction, resulting in feelings of isolation and hesitation in participating socially.

James described the emotional impact of these experiences by stating:

Sometimes I feel sad if I feel they don't like me and if they cannot understand my sign. -James/Participant

James's statement illustrates that communication barriers affected not only his academic participation but also his emotional well-being and social experiences. His response suggests that misunderstandings in communication occasionally led him to question how he was perceived by others, contributing to feelings of sadness and uncertainty. These experiences demonstrate that successful inclusion involves more than physical presence in the classroom; it also requires meaningful opportunities to establish supportive peer relationships and a genuine sense of belonging.

Teacher Nora similarly observed that James sometimes withdrew from social interaction. She explained:

sa kanang socialization kay usahay ma gud na isolate iyang kaugalingon naa siyay mga assumptions sa iyang kaugalingon nga basin daw pabigat lang siya sa iyang mga classmates that's why kanang dili kayo siya mangutana kung dili pud nimu siya pangutan.on kung okay lang nakasabot ba ka di pud siya muiingon nga nakasabot siya mao na siya usahay Makita nako nga mga challenges niya.... (Aside from communication and lesson difficulty, socialization is also a challenge. Sometimes, James tends to isolate himself. He seems to have assumptions about himself, like thinking that he might be a burden to his classmates. Because of this, he does not usually ask questions unless you ask him first if he is okay or if he understood the lesson. Even then, he does not easily say whether he truly understood or not. These are some of the challenges that I observed from him.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's observations indicate that James's communication difficulties occasionally influenced his confidence in interacting with others. She explained that he sometimes isolated himself because he worried about becoming a burden to his classmates, causing him to hesitate when asking questions or expressing his

need for clarification. This finding suggests that communication barriers may contribute to reduced social participation when learners become reluctant to initiate interactions due to concerns about acceptance or misunderstanding. Such experiences emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive classroom culture where learners feel psychologically safe to communicate and participate.

Jes further described James's social relationships within the classroom:

Ako maam, ako gyud always iyang makatapad sa klase, maong nasanay na gyud pud ko makauban siya maam. So far, naka sabot-sabot og nakabalo-balo na gyud pud ko og sign. But sa uban maam, di jud malikayan nga di jud siya ma estorya og mao sad guro nga wala jud siya'y circle of friends jud sa amo maam kay lagi tungod sa most of us dili pa gydu kaayo kabalo og kasabot sa sign. (For me, Ma'am, I am always the one seated beside him in class, so I have already become used to being with him. Over time, I have gradually learned and understood some sign language. However, with our other classmates, it is difficult to avoid communication challenges because most of us still do not know or fully understand sign language. I think that is also one of the reasons why he does not really have a close circle of friends in our class.) - Jes/KI2

Jes's account offers valuable insight into the influence of communication on peer relationships within the inclusive classroom. She observed that their friendship developed through continuous interaction and her willingness to learn sign language, allowing them to communicate more effectively over time. At the same time, she recognized that many classmates had limited knowledge of sign language, reducing opportunities for James to establish broader social connections. Her response suggests that social inclusion depends not only on the learner's willingness to interact but also on the communication competence and inclusiveness of peers. This finding underscores the importance of promoting sign language awareness and shared communication practices among hearing students to strengthen meaningful peer relationships.

Theme 2. The Resilience Process of the Deaf Learner

The Resilience Process of the Deaf Learner describes how James responded to the challenges encountered in an inclusive teacher education environment through adaptive coping strategies, personal determination, and support from individuals within his academic community. Although communication barriers, instructional limitations, and social challenges affected his educational experience, the findings revealed that he actively sought ways to overcome these adversities rather than withdrawing from them. His resilience was reflected in his ability to utilize available resources, establish collaborative relationships with teachers and classmates, and continuously adapt to the demands of inclusive education. These experiences illustrate resilience as a dynamic process in which personal initiative and environmental support interacted to promote continued participation and academic persistence.

Sub-theme 2.1 Adaptive communication strategies

James employed various adaptive communication strategies to address communication barriers in the inclusive classroom. These included the use of cellphone messaging, written notes, modified signing, and other collaborative communication approaches that enabled him to exchange information effectively with teachers and classmates despite differences in communication modes.

James described how he managed communication challenges by relying on his cellphone. He shared:

I manage this challenge through using my cellphone in communicating with them and this way I can understand and build strong connection with them to help me struggling in my studies... And, I am thankful this big help. - James/Participant

James's response demonstrates his proactive approach to overcoming communication barriers. Instead of allowing limited sign language proficiency among teachers and classmates to restrict his participation, he identified an alternative means of communication that enabled him to express his ideas, seek clarification, and maintain meaningful interactions. His statement indicates that resilience was manifested not only through persistence but also through his ability to identify practical solutions that supported both his academic learning and interpersonal relationships.

This finding was further supported by Jes, who consistently observed James's efforts to communicate effectively with others. She stated:

Based sa akong observation maam, since kami jud ang tapad niya sa seating arrangement everytime sa subject na classmate mi maam makita jud nako maam nga naga try jud siya sa iyang best na makig communicate sa amo like kung di jud mi kasabot iya dayon e type sa iya phone or gina hinay-hinay jud niya og sign maam. Willing jud siya mo help og tudlo pud sa iyang classmate na makabalo og sign. (Based on my observation, ma'am, since we are seated beside him every time we are classmates in a subject, I can really see that he always tries his best to communicate with us. Whenever we do not understand his signs, he immediately types his message on his phone or signs more slowly so that we can understand him. He is also willing to help and teach his classmates who want to learn sign language.) - Jes/KI2

Jes's account provides valuable evidence that James's adaptive communication strategies were consistently demonstrated in everyday classroom interactions. From a peer's perspective, she observed that James did not become discouraged when communication difficulties occurred. Instead, he adjusted his communication by typing messages on his cellphone, slowing down his signing, and patiently assisting classmates who wished to learn sign language. These behaviors illustrate that resilience was not limited to overcoming personal challenges but also involved fostering reciprocal communication and promoting a more inclusive classroom environment. His willingness to teach his classmates sign language further reflects his initiative in reducing communication barriers through collaboration rather than dependence.

Teacher Nora likewise confirmed the importance of technology in facilitating communication. She explained: base sa akong na experience as his teacher kuan jud kanang nagagamit mi og cellphone or kung di makaya sulat.isulat jud namo then ipabasa sa iyaha then sulat napud or sa chat communication sa cellphone mag gamit mi og cellphone kay para masabtan niya (We use a cellphone, or if that is not enough, we write it down. We write our message for him to read, and then he writes back, or we communicate through chat on our cellphones. We use our phones because that makes it easier for him to understand.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's narration reinforces James's account by illustrating how communication became a shared responsibility between teacher and learner. Because fluent sign language communication was not always possible, alternative methods such as cellphone messaging and written notes became essential instructional strategies. Her response demonstrates that technology functioned as an accessible bridge that minimized communication barriers and allowed classroom instruction to continue despite existing limitations. This finding suggests that resilience was strengthened not only through James's personal initiative but also through the teacher's willingness to adapt instructional practices to accommodate his communication needs.

Sub-theme 2.2 Collaborative adjustment and support mechanisms

Collaborative Adjustment and Support Mechanisms describe the shared efforts of James, his teachers, and his classmates in creating a more inclusive learning environment. The findings revealed that resilience was not solely an individual attribute but was strengthened through collaborative relationships that promoted participation, encouragement, and mutual understanding. Teachers modified instructional approaches, classmates voluntarily provided assistance, and James actively engaged with available support while gradually developing greater independence. These collective efforts contributed to his continued academic engagement despite the challenges encountered in the inclusive classroom.

James acknowledged the significant role played by his teachers in helping him overcome academic challenges. He stated:

My teacher helps me when I am confused and help me to understand things. And they taught me to be strong support in my studies. -James/Participant

James's response highlights the importance of supportive teacher–student relationships in promoting resilience. His statement suggests that teacher support extended beyond explaining lessons; it also provided emotional encouragement that strengthened his confidence to continue pursuing his studies. The guidance he received enabled him to manage academic challenges while reinforcing his belief that he could succeed despite communication barriers.

This perspective was echoed by Jes, who described her own role in assisting James during classroom activities. She shared:

since kami jud ang tapad maam og nag friends na jud mi so, everytime ma confuse siya or naa siyay mga pangutana ako jud na siyang ginatabangan maam.(Since I am the one who always sits beside him and we have become close friends, whenever he gets confused or has questions, I am always there to help him.) -Jes/KI2

Jes's response demonstrates how peer support contributed to James's resilience within the inclusive classroom. Her willingness to provide assistance whenever he experienced confusion reflects the development of mutual trust and collaborative learning between hearing and Deaf students. Rather than perceiving support as an obligation, Jes described it as a natural aspect of their friendship and daily classroom interaction. This finding suggests that meaningful peer relationships can reduce feelings of isolation and encourage greater participation among Deaf learners in inclusive educational settings.

Teacher Nora further emphasized the importance of collaborative support by describing the different strategies implemented to encourage James's participation. She explained:

sa socialization is..amoa lang siya ay si james gina encourage pud gyud namo siya og siya pud gina ano pud niya iyang kaugalingon gina try pud niya iyang kaugalingon na moa no jud sa iyang mga classmate. Ah.. sa una man gud naa siya ato iyang buddy ohh buddy niya si ah si..pangalan gani niya si..kalimot ko..ah basta katong 4th year ni graduate na..ay oo si jack. So kato d I isa pud to nga kuan no nga atleast naay atleast naay maka help niya nga kaning mag unsa ni..mag sign or mag interpret sa mga lesson no in.ana mag interpret sa mga lesson then ang kuan ato is di siya mag unsa ni di siya mag malisud ..naay mga activities gina ano siya gina inform siya niya naay mo buddy sa iyaha , naay mo send sa iyaha kaya lang katong time nga unsa ni time na nga kanang ni graduate nato iyang buddy mao na to nga nag ano na gyud siya sa kanang iyang kaugalingon na jud then amo napud siyang gina encourage nga kanang e try jud nga muduol gyud siya sa iyang mga classmates no or nangita jud mi ato nga mag assign mi nga ikaw mu ano sa iyaha kay lagi kato maulaw lagi siya ..oo okay karun atleast karun naga ano na siya naga try na siyag kuan sa iyang mga classmates... (In terms of socialization, we always encouraged James to interact with others, and he also made an effort to push himself to approach and socialize with his classmates. Before, he had a buddy—a fourth-year student named Jack, who has already graduated. Having a buddy was very helpful because there was someone who could use sign language and interpret the lessons for him. This made it easier for James to understand classroom discussions and participate in activities. His buddy also kept him informed about class requirements and sent him important information whenever necessary. However, when his buddy graduated, James had to become more independent. At the same time, we continued encouraging him to approach his classmates and build relationships with them. We even tried assigning classmates to assist and interact with him because he was naturally shy. Fortunately, now we can see that he is already making an effort to communicate and engage more with his classmates.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's account demonstrates that James initially relied on a structured buddy system to facilitate communication and participation within the classroom. His assigned buddy, Jack, interpreted lessons, explained classroom activities, and ensured that James remained informed about academic requirements. This external support reduced communication barriers and enabled James to participate more confidently in the early stages of his teacher education journey. A significant turning point occurred when Jack graduated. Without his assigned buddy, James gradually learned to navigate academic and social challenges more independently. Rather than replacing the buddy with another permanent support person, teachers encouraged James to approach classmates directly, initiate communication, and build new relationships. This transition reflects the progression from dependence on external support toward greater self-reliance and personal agency. His resilience became evident as he transformed initial reliance on structured assistance into confidence in managing classroom interactions independently.

Theme 3. Positive Realizations and Insights

Positive Realizations and Insights represent the meaningful outcomes that emerged from James's experiences while navigating an inclusive teacher education environment. Although his educational journey was characterized by communication, instructional, and social challenges, these experiences became opportunities for personal development, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of purpose. The findings revealed that resilience extended beyond overcoming adversity; it also enabled James to recognize his capabilities, develop

independence, and cultivate a positive outlook toward learning and inclusion. Through the continuous support of teachers and classmates, together with his own determination, James transformed challenges into valuable learning experiences that contributed to his personal and academic growth.

Sub-theme 3.1 Self-reliance and personal growth

Self-Reliance and Personal Growth describe how James gradually developed independence, confidence, and responsibility throughout his experiences in the teacher education program. The findings revealed that the challenges he encountered encouraged him to become more resourceful, adaptable, and determined to achieve his academic goals. Rather than relying solely on assistance from others, James learned to take initiative in addressing difficulties, enabling him to become more confident in managing both academic and social responsibilities within the inclusive learning environment.

Reflecting on his educational journey, James shared:

My important things I learned from my experiences as deaf learner in teacher education is how to adjust and being independent and continue pursuing my studies. -James/Participant

James's statement illustrates that his experiences in inclusive education contributed significantly to his personal development. His response suggests that resilience was reflected not only in his ability to cope with challenges but also in his willingness to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining his commitment to completing his education. Learning to become independent was not simply an outcome of overcoming obstacles but a continuous process of developing confidence, responsibility, and perseverance throughout his academic journey.

This realization was further supported by Jes, who observed substantial growth in James during their years as classmates. She explained:

So. ahmm..maka proud jud siya maam kay despite sa iyang disability, still nagapaningkamot gihapon siya nga maabot iyang dreams og mahuman siya sa iyang pag skwela. Nakita nako sa iya maam na naging independent jud siya sa iyang college journey po and wala jud siya nagsalig nga e consider siya because you know maam naa siyay disability but mas na boost jud iyang confidence that he can do better just like the other students maam (So, ahmm, I am really proud of him, ma'am, because despite his disability, he continues to strive hard to achieve his dreams and finish his studies. I have observed that he has become truly independent throughout his college journey, and he never relied on being given special consideration because of his disability. Instead, his confidence was strengthened, and he came to believe that he could perform just as well as the other students.) -.Jes/KI2

Jes's account provides an important peer perspective on James's personal growth throughout his college journey. Her observations indicate that his independence developed gradually through consistent effort rather than through special treatment or accommodation alone. She emphasized that James chose to demonstrate his abilities instead of depending on considerations related to his disability, reflecting a strong sense of self-efficacy and determination. Her response also suggests that his growing confidence positively influenced how he interacted with others and approached academic challenges. From a peer's perspective, James was recognized not for his disability but for his perseverance, responsibility, and commitment to achieving his goals alongside his hearing classmates.

Taken together, the responses of James and Jes demonstrate that self-reliance was cultivated through continuous adaptation to academic and social challenges. These findings suggest that inclusive education can promote personal growth when learners are provided opportunities to exercise independence while receiving appropriate support. Within this case, resilience contributed to the development of confidence, self-determination, and a stronger belief in one's capacity to succeed despite adversity.

Sub-theme 3.2 Empowerment and Inclusive Mindset

Empowerment and Inclusive Mindset describe how James developed a stronger belief in his own capabilities while recognizing the value of support, collaboration, and inclusion within the educational community. The findings revealed that positive interactions with teachers and classmates encouraged him to become more motivated, confident, and committed to achieving his academic aspirations. Rather than viewing his disability

as a limitation, James gradually embraced the belief that he could participate meaningfully and succeed within an inclusive educational environment.

Expressing his appreciation for the support he received, James shared:

I am thankful to my teachers who help me in my studies, I promise to study hard to pass in my subjects. - James/Participant

James's response reflects an important shift in perspective from merely receiving assistance to recognizing the value of shared responsibility in the learning process. His expression of gratitude demonstrates that teacher support served not only as an academic resource but also as a source of encouragement that strengthened his motivation to continue striving toward his educational goals. His commitment to studying hard illustrates a sense of personal accountability and empowerment, indicating that he viewed success as the result of both individual effort and collaborative support.

Teacher Nora reinforced this perspective by emphasizing that their goal was not simply to help James complete his studies but to prepare him to become an independent learner. She explained:

Amo lang gyud siyang gina anohan kanang gina encourage nga maningkamot kay dili hindrance ang iyahang disability nga mupugong sa iyaha para para dili siya makahuman sap ag skwela and then ang goal jud namo is kanang maging independent si James mao na siya maging independent siya sa iyang pagtuon no (We continually encourage him to keep striving because his disability should not become a hindrance that prevents him from finishing his education. Our main goal is for James to become independent, especially in managing his own learning and academic journey.) -Teacher Nora/KI1

Teacher Nora's account demonstrates that the support provided to James extended beyond addressing immediate academic needs. Instead, it focused on empowering him to develop the confidence and independence necessary to manage future challenges on his own. By consistently encouraging him to persevere despite communication barriers, she emphasized his abilities rather than his limitations. Her response reflects an inclusive educational approach that seeks to promote learner autonomy while recognizing the importance of appropriate guidance and encouragement throughout the learning process.

IV. Discussions

This chapter discussed the lived experiences of the deaf learner in navigating an inclusive teacher education environment, particularly in relation to the challenges encountered, the coping mechanisms employed, and the insights gained. These findings were juxtaposed with existing literature on inclusive education and examined how these realities may contribute to improving educational practices. Furthermore, it presented the implications for theory and practice, as well as future research directions that may enhance inclusive teaching and learning for deaf students.

Juxtapose with Previous Findings

This study highlighted major themes related to Deaf learner adversities, Resilience process of a Deaf learner, and the Positive realizations and Insights.

Deaf Learner Adversities

The findings revealed that inclusion extends beyond the physical placement of learners in mainstream classrooms and requires meaningful participation, equitable access to learning opportunities, and appropriate educational support to ensure successful learning experiences. Recent literature emphasizes that inclusive education is achieved not merely through access to mainstream settings but through instructional practices that remove barriers and promote active participation for all learners, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing students (Alsalem & Alzahrani, 2023; López-Gavira et al., 2023). James's experiences demonstrated that communication served as the primary barrier, limiting both academic understanding and social interaction. This finding reflects recent evidence indicating that communication barriers continue to hinder Deaf students' participation and inclusion in higher education, particularly when access to interpreters, effective communication strategies, and

Deaf awareness among teachers and peers is limited (Hendry et al., 2021). Similarly, James experienced difficulty expressing his ideas and interacting with both teachers and classmates because they did not share a common language. Herrera Batista and Sejas García (2023) likewise reported that communication barriers not only hinder academic performance but also reduce deaf students' sense of belonging within higher education institutions.

The findings further indicate that the adversities encountered by James were multidimensional. These challenges extended beyond communication barriers to include instructional limitations and social isolation, reflecting the need for inclusive education to provide equitable access, meaningful participation, and appropriate educational support for all learners (UNESCO, 2020). James's difficulty communicating with teachers and classmates illustrates how limited access to effective communication can disrupt classroom interaction, reduce learning opportunities, and restrict active participation in academic activities. Recent studies have shown that insufficient teacher preparedness, limited awareness of accessible instructional practices, and inadequate communication accommodations continue to hinder the educational experiences of Deaf students in higher education (Villarente, 2024; Nikolarai & Kofidou, 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that when educational environments fail to establish accessible communication systems, Deaf students are more likely to experience exclusion, reduced engagement, and limited participation despite being physically included in mainstream classrooms (Alsamih, 2024).

The findings also revealed that instructional gaps significantly affected the learning process. Although teachers demonstrated willingness to assist, they were not fully equipped with the necessary sign language skills to effectively support the learner. This reflects a disconnect between inclusive education policies and actual classroom practices (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Recent literature suggests that without adequate teacher preparation and institutional support, inclusive education may result in learners being physically included but not meaningfully engaged in classroom learning. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and competence in implementing inclusive practices are essential for promoting active participation among learners with diverse educational needs (Boyle et al., 2023). Likewise, Kelly et al. (2022) emphasized that effective inclusion depends largely on teachers' preparation to address the communication and learning needs of deaf students. Their study highlighted that insufficient professional training limits teachers' ability to provide meaningful learning experiences for learners with hearing impairment.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that communication barriers also contributed to social interaction difficulties. James's hesitation to engage with others and his tendency to withdraw from social interactions illustrate how communication challenges may gradually develop into emotional and social barriers. Recent evidence indicates that limited opportunities for effective communication reduce Deaf students' confidence in interacting with peers and faculty, often leading to feelings of isolation and diminished participation in campus life (Kisanga, 2024). Likewise, when learners perceive themselves as excluded or unable to communicate effectively with those around them, the goals of inclusive education—particularly meaningful participation and a sense of belonging—are not fully achieved. This finding is supported by Freire et al. (2024), who reported that students with special educational needs experience stronger peer relationships and a greater sense of belonging when classroom environments promote inclusive social participation and supportive peer networks. Similarly, Acilo et al. (2025) found that Filipino deaf students demonstrated resilience by relying on peer support, adaptive communication strategies, and personal determination to succeed in higher education. This closely reflects James's experiences of utilizing technology and seeking assistance from classmates to remain actively engaged in classroom activities.

Resilience Process of a Deaf Learner

The findings revealed that James's coping strategies were both adaptive and collaborative in nature. His use of technology, particularly his cellphone, served as an alternative communication tool that enabled him to bridge communication gaps with teachers and classmates. Recent studies have shown that digital communication technologies and accessible learning resources enhance communication access and facilitate the academic participation of Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in higher education (Ungeitytė & Alisauskienė, 2022). This strategy reflects effective resource utilization, whereby available technological resources are maximized to overcome communication barriers and sustain engagement in learning activities. Furthermore, contemporary

perspectives describe resilience as a dynamic process that develops through the interaction of individual strengths, supportive relationships, and enabling environments, allowing learners to adapt successfully despite adversity (Potts & Le Hunte, 2024). Furthermore, the use of accessible communication tools promotes greater participation and inclusion of learners with hearing loss in educational settings (World Health Organization, 2023).

The findings further revealed that resilience was not demonstrated solely through individual efforts but also through collaborative coping mechanisms within the learning environment. Teachers and classmates adjusted their communication strategies by writing messages, using chat applications, and simplifying communication to facilitate interaction. These collaborative efforts suggest that coping is not solely the responsibility of the learner but a shared process involving the support of the educational community (Friend & Cook, 2017). Similarly, Anwar et al. (2023) found that learners with hearing impairment develop adaptive coping strategies that enable them to manage academic demands and persist despite communication-related challenges.

Existing literature supports that peer support and teacher flexibility significantly enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This finding is further supported by Villarente (2024), who reported that teachers frequently modify their instructional strategies, including the use of written communication and visual supports, to facilitate learning among deaf students when sign language proficiency is limited. Likewise, Martin and Eludo (2025) found that sign language training enhances teachers' confidence in communicating with deaf learners, resulting in more effective classroom interaction and increased learner participation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that resilience is not only functional but also developmental. James's gradual transition from dependence through a buddy system to greater independence demonstrates that coping strategies evolve over time as learners develop greater confidence, self-determination, and adaptive skills. Recent evidence suggests that autonomy and self-determination are critical factors enabling students with disabilities to successfully navigate higher education and achieve positive academic outcomes (Moriña & Martins, 2024). Likewise, effective inclusive education should promote learner autonomy through appropriate accommodations, accessible support systems, and opportunities for independent participation rather than prolonged dependence on external assistance (Bartolo et al., 2023). These findings are further supported by Römhild and Holleder (2023), whose systematic review concluded that disability-related services, reasonable accommodations, and institutional support significantly enhance students' participation, independence, and academic success in higher education.

Positive Realizations and Insights

The analysis of James's experiences revealed key insights related to personal growth, independence, and empowerment. In terms of self-reliance, the findings demonstrated that he developed the ability to adjust and persist despite various challenges encountered throughout his academic journey. His experiences suggest that successfully navigating adversity strengthened his adaptive skills and capacity to respond positively to academic and social challenges. Recent research indicates that resilience develops through the dynamic interaction of personal strengths, supportive relationships, and educational environments that enable learners with disabilities to adapt and thrive despite adversity (Mawila, 2023). Furthermore, this finding is consistent with contemporary evidence highlighting resilience as an important outcome of inclusive education, where evidence-based supports foster students' academic, social, emotional, self-determination, and life-skills development (Tsokova et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the observations shared by his classmate reinforced the theme of self-reliance and personal growth. Jes expressed admiration for James's determination to complete his studies despite the challenges associated with his disability. According to the key informant, James demonstrated a remarkable level of independence throughout his college journey and did not rely on receiving special consideration because of his condition. Instead, his experiences appeared to strengthen his confidence and belief in his own abilities. This finding suggests that James's resilience extended beyond academic persistence and developed into a strong sense of self-efficacy. Recent studies have shown that students with disabilities who learn in supportive and inclusive educational environments develop higher levels of academic self-efficacy, motivation, and well-

being, enabling them to participate more confidently in academic activities (Kausik & Hussain, 2023). Likewise, research has demonstrated that self-efficacy is strengthened when inclusive educational practices foster supportive relationships, positive learning experiences, and opportunities for active participation, thereby promoting learners' confidence and independence (Woodcock et al., 2023). The consistency between James's narrative and the perspective of his classmate further indicates that his inclusive educational experiences contributed not only to academic persistence but also to personal growth, independence, and a positive self-perception.

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of social support in shaping the participant's educational experiences. Encouragement from teachers and classmates contributed substantially to his personal and academic development. This supports recent literature emphasizing that inclusive educational environments should provide not only academic accommodations but also meaningful social support and opportunities for social integration, as these significantly enhance learners' well-being, participation, and academic success (Römhild & Holleder, 2023). Likewise, Freitas et al. (2022) described resilience among deaf learners as a dynamic process strengthened by protective factors such as supportive teachers, peers, and inclusive educational environments.

Another significant finding that emerged from the analysis was the theme of empowerment. The participant's teachers intentionally encouraged James to become increasingly independent rather than overly dependent on continuous assistance. This approach reflects contemporary inclusive education, in which the goal extends beyond providing access to education and focuses on fostering learner autonomy, self-determination, and active participation in academic and social contexts. Recent evidence suggests that empowering students with disabilities involves strengthening their self-advocacy skills, self-determination, and capacity to utilize available support systems to participate independently in higher education (Cho & Jones, 2024). Likewise, research has shown that inclusive postsecondary education promotes empowerment by creating opportunities for students to exercise self-determination, set personal goals, and actively participate in decisions affecting their educational experiences (Smith et al., 2024).

The corroboration of the narratives provided by James, Teacher Nora, and his classmate, Jes, further supports the relevance of Resilience Theory in explaining how deaf learners successfully navigate inclusive educational environments despite experiencing various adversities. The findings suggest that resilience does not simply emerge from the presence of challenges; rather, it develops when communication barriers, instructional limitations, and social difficulties are mitigated through protective factors, effective coping strategies, and a supportive learning environment. This interpretation is supported by Imhof et al. (2024), who found that self-regulated learning and resilience are significant predictors of students' academic competence and successful adaptation to educational challenges.

Implications of the Study

The implications of theory of this study support the continuing relevance of Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001) in explaining how deaf learners navigate the challenges of inclusive education. However, the findings also extend the theory by demonstrating that resilience does not develop solely through an individual's capacity to endure adversity. Rather, resilience emerges through the interaction between personal strengths and protective environmental factors. Communication barriers, instructional limitations, and social challenges became manageable when supported by appropriate coping strategies, accessible resources, and a responsive learning environment. Thus, the study reinforces the view that resilience is a dynamic process shaped by both individual agency and environmental support.

The implications for future practice of this study suggest that inclusive education should move beyond providing physical access to ensuring meaningful participation and equitable learning opportunities for deaf learners. Educational institutions may strengthen inclusive practices by providing teachers with continuous professional development in sign language and inclusive instructional strategies. Likewise, the integration of assistive technologies, the promotion of peer collaboration, and the provision of consistent teacher support may enhance learners' communication, participation, and academic engagement. These practices can foster independence, confidence, and empowerment among deaf learners while creating learning environments that are more responsive to their diverse educational needs.

Future Direction of the Study

Conceptually, I now illustrate that learner adversities (predictive variable), such as communication barriers, instructional gaps, and social difficulties, may lead to limited participation, isolation, and learning challenges (criterion variable) unless the process is mediated by effective coping mechanisms. In this modified conceptual model, protective factors—particularly technology use, teacher support, and peer collaboration—serve as mediating constructs that determine whether the adverse conditions will hinder or support the learner's development. When these resources are sufficiently provided, when coping strategies are appropriately applied, and when the learner is encouraged toward active participation, the process leads to resilience characterized by adaptation, independence, and engagement, rather than withdrawal and disconnection.

Building upon this modified framework, future research may focus on empirically testing the mediating role of coping mechanisms between learner adversities and resilience outcomes through mediation analysis using advanced statistical approaches such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Such an approach would validate the relationships identified in this study and measure the strength of each factor in promoting positive outcomes. Additionally, the emerging themes and subthemes identified in this inquiry may be utilized as indicators for quantitative testing, and future studies may conduct Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to develop reliable instruments that capture the dimensions of adversities, coping mechanisms, and resilience among deaf learners. Expanding the scope to include multiple participants and diverse educational contexts may also strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

Ultimately, this future direction envisions the refinement of the resilience-based model of inclusive education into a more integrative framework that recognizes the mediating role of support systems and the developmental process of learner independence and empowerment. Such advancements will deepen the understanding of resilience among deaf learners and inform the design of inclusive programs that promote not only access but also meaningful participation and long-term success in education.

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