

**Communication Challenges between Hearing Impaired Students and EFL Teachers in Inclusive English Language Classrooms: Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School in Focus**

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**Abstract**

*This study was aimed to explore the communication challenges between hearing impaired students and EFL teachers in Inclusive English Language classrooms. To achieve its objectives, the study used Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School as research site and employed qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Classroom observation, interview and document analysis were used to gather data from the study participants. Six lessons were observed to generate data on classroom interaction. An English teacher, four hearing impaired students, and a hearing impaired students' counselor participated in the interview. The study found out that the students with hearing impairments were placed in regular classrooms without special organization that could meet the needs of both groups of students. The regular classroom teacher taught the inclusive class without sign language interpreter. The communication challenge was more prevalent during English language classes especially, listening and speaking lessons. The problem of making sounds was so difficult that automatic vocalization and reproduction was found to be problematic; there was problem of substitution of consonants, omission of sounds and transposition of letters. Since there was no sign language interpreter in the classrooms, the challenge was weighty. To improve these problems of communication intermission, issues related to teachers and facilities need to be reorganized to transform the conventional classrooms to classrooms suitable for the hearing impaired. Teachers must be trained with sign languages besides the qualifications to teach the language (English). Materials and plans for lessons need to be designed to consider the needs of the hearing impaired students*

**Key words:** hearing impairment; Inclusive education; mainstream classroom; EFL

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Hearing impairment, next to leg problems and blindness, is the third largest disability in Ethiopia. It is one of the disabilities that are a barrier to join schools (Country profile on Disability, 2002). Nowadays, the people's attitude about hearing impairment is changing and thousands of students with hearing impairment are at schools (Demisew, 2014).

According to Moravkov (2011), students with hearing impairment have two options to get their education. These options are attending schools specialized for teaching the students with hearing impairment or mainstream schools and learn with hearing students. The first option focuses on developing culture of including the hearing impaired in education. In Ethiopia, the education of children with disabilities such as visually and hearing impairment have been served by special schools for the last four decades. However, in recent years the accessibility of education for people with disabilities has ensured in special needs education. This special needs education in Ethiopia initially was initiated by overseas missionaries (Tirusew, 2005). The other option to learn is joining mainstream classes or inclusive education. A lot of causes lead to choose inclusive education. These causes are normalization, deinstitutionalization, early intervention and early childhood programmes, technological advances, civil rights movement and resulting litigation, advocacy groups, separated nature of special schools and classes, disproportionate representation and educational reform (Berg, 2004; Salend, 2001; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997).

Inclusive education is associated with the mainstream participation of learners with impairment and having special needs education (World Education Forum, 2010). It is a wide transformation intended to include students with disabilities in mainstream regular classrooms. In this reform, school curriculum, teaching methods, organization and resources need to be adapted to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their ability can successfully participate in the regular classrooms (Mitiller, 1995 in Tewodros, 2014).

Similarly, Berg (2004, p. 11) describes mainstreaming as “the placement of students with disabilities in general education setting only when they can meet traditional academic expectations with minimal assistance.” The basic

premise of the mainstreaming movement is that principles of anti-discrimination, equity, social justice, and basic human rights make it imperative that students with disabilities and special needs should enjoy the same access as all other students to a regular school environment and to a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum (Prakasha, 2012).

Even though inclusive education means the inclusion of all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions to the mainstream regular classroom, in this study inclusive education refers only to the inclusion of students with hearing impairment in inclusive or mainstream classrooms.

Inclusion of hearing impaired students in inclusive classrooms has both advantages and challenges. Inclusive education is important to increase confidence in the teaching and learning efficacy, to aware hearing impaired students as positive role models for all students, to meet the needs of all students with or without disabilities and to associate with new classmates (Berg, 2004). Therefore, both teachers and students are expected to do a lot to get the function. On the one hand, the teacher, as he/she faces two sorts of students in the class, has to revise his/her methodology and approach to enable both groups proportionally. On the other hand, the hearing impaired students strive to learn along with their hearing peers. The shift towards inclusion in mainstream classrooms has the challenges of changing existing attitudes and values of key players, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills, limited resources and inappropriate organization (UNESCO, 2005).

Stoppok (2005) states that hearing impairment changes the condition of early language acquisition, which requires curricular adaptations to provide teachers with support when planning and organizing English lessons. Foreign language learning for students with a hearing impairment might not be as effective if only subject specific goals are taken into account. Cross-curricular goals, on the other hand, including the development of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding will elicit interest and promote enjoyment during exposure to the foreign language.

When English language is used as a medium of instruction, hearing impairment has double effects: the problems in English language learning and the academic achievement of learners. The statement given by Standley

(2005) intensifies this argument. The statement is, “All educational process that is mediated by language will be negatively impacted” (Standley, 2005, p.11). This in turn affects the language development of students, their literacy acquisition and educational outcomes.

In inclusive EFL classroom, English language enables the students to fully participate in the lesson and successfully accomplish other subjects’ requirement. In Ethiopian secondary schools in general and in Regional State of Oromia in particular, English is being given as a subject and medium of instruction for all subjects except the mother tongue (Afan Oromo) and the national working language (Amharic). Therefore, the level of proficiency and mastery in English language in one or another way affects students’ academic achievement. In Biftu Nekemte Secondary School, both hearing and hearing impaired students learn English language as a subject and use it to learn other subjects. To master the language properly and to be benefited from the other courses, their knowledge and skill of English language has to be fertile. Therefore, researching English language learning and teaching practices at the targeted school which included hearing impaired students and hearing peers was very important. To this effect, the communication challenges that teachers and hearing impaired students faced in inclusive EFL classroom were explored.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Both local and international researchers have conducted studies on learning and teaching of hearing impaired students in inclusive education. For instance, Jordanian researchers El-Zraigot and Smadi (2012) conducted a study on “*Challenges of Educating Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Jordan*” and found out that students with hearing impairment were considered exceptional learners. They required special service offered by qualified and skilled teachers to respond to their unique needs. Tewodros (2014), Demisew (2014), Wondosen, Yitayal and Semahgn (2014), and Shimelis (2011) have conducted studies on inclusive education of hearing impairment. Demisew (2014) identifies the barriers towards inclusive education. Some of the problems identified were organization of education, an inflexible curriculum, problems of language and communication, and lack of human resource development.

Having such challenges to meet the needs of all students in the inclusive classroom is not an easy process because it requires a lot of struggle and commitment to overcome barriers (Wondosen, Yitayal & Semahgn, 2014). Although barriers are present to implement inclusive education in schools, currently hearing impaired students are learning in inclusive classrooms with.

According to Tewodros (2014), hearing impaired students face challenges when they are assigned to regular classes. These challenges occur due to lack of knowledge of Ethiopian Sign Language, lack of motivation of teachers to learn Ethiopian sign language, lack of resources and unavailability of resource room. Moreover, Shimelis (2011) found out that teaching hearing impaired students and learning as a hearing impaired students is challenging because of the use of inappropriate linguistic expression.

All the above mentioned researchers worked on the general education of hearing impaired students. The researcher couldn't find studies on communication challenges in EFL inclusive classroom in particular as his effort goes. The intention of the researcher was, therefore, to explore communication challenges of teachers and hearing impaired students faced in mainstream EFL classrooms. Consequently, the focus of the study was on English language teaching and learning. The rationale to focus on English is, since the academic success or failure of hearing impaired students is fundamentally dependent on the medium of instruction-English. The most important aspects of communication are writing, reading, speaking and listening. Fundamentally, speaking and listening is crucial for classroom communication, which is hypothesized as greater challenge of teaching and learning EFL in an inclusive classroom. The research questions that have been addressed in the accomplishment of the study were the following:

- a) How classroom communication is implemented in teaching hearing impaired students in inclusive EFL classrooms?
- b) What are the communication challenges of teaching English language to students with hearing impairment in inclusive classrooms?
- c) What are the communication challenges of hearing impaired students' in learning English language in inclusive EFL classrooms?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This research generally aimed at exploring challenges that teachers and hearing impaired students faced in inclusive English listening and speaking skill classrooms.

Specifically, the study attempted to:

- i) Investigate the general classroom communication in inclusive EFL classrooms;
- ii) Assess challenges facing teachers in teaching English language for students with hearing impairment in inclusive classrooms; and
- iii) Identify the challenges students with hearing impairment faced during learning English language in inclusive classrooms.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 The Research Design and Approach**

The study aimed to explore the challenges teachers and hearing impaired students faced in inclusive EFL classrooms. To achieve its objectives, this study used exploratory research design. The justification to select exploratory research design was that this study wanted to explore challenges in EFL classrooms for students with hearing impairment in inclusive education context. Qualitative research approach was employed in this study. Qualitative research is very important to explore issues of the study; understanding and interpretations of social phenomena while it happens in its routine setting and this approach provides a unique tool for studying what exists in practice. Thus, the study qualitatively analyzes issues related to the challenges in English language teaching and learning that is visible in everyday happenings.

### **3.3 The Study Area**

The study area was Biftu Nekemte Secondary School. Biftu Nekemte is one of the state run schools in Nekemte city. The reason for the selection of the school as a study site was its experience of implementing inclusive education since 2011. Currently, the school registered 27 (13 Grade nine and 14 Grade 10) hearing impaired students at mainstream classrooms. There was no other senior secondary school that practices such sort of inclusive education in Nekemte. Thus, to explore issues regarding English listening and speaking skill teaching and learning for hearing impaired students in mainstream classrooms, the school was considered as an appropriate site for the study.

### **2.3 Population and Sampling**

The populations of the study were 13 grade nine students with hearing impairment, an English language teacher, and an interpreter. Consequently, the sources of data for the study were four students with hearing impairment, the teacher, and the interpreter. The sampling technique the researcher used was purposive sampling method because the students were selected in a way that represented different groups of hearing impairments; profound, moderate, and severe. In general, the researcher used 6 participants as sample for the study. The reason for selecting grade nine students as cases was because of their freshness for inclusive classroom and because they were coming from the special needs school.

### **2.4 Data Collection Instruments**

To collect the data, interview, observation and document analysis were employed. Interview was one of the data collection instruments that the researcher employed in the study. It was designed to collect in-depth data about the challenges impaired students in inclusive classroom faced during learning and teaching English language. Semi structured interview was used to get detailed information by probing and asking follow up questions. Six subjects of the study were interviewed. The interview with the teacher and the interpreter, and hearing impaired students counselor was conducted in Amharic and the transcriptions were translated into English. The interview with the students was completed through the help of interpreter and the speech of the interpreter was recorded for analysis and the transcription has been in Amharic. Then, the Amharic transcription was translated into English.

The other tool of data collection was observation. The rationale behind using observation in this research was to explore the classroom practices of teachers and students in English classes. Each of listening and speaking lessons were observed three times. All observations were recorded using checklist that has been adapted from Johnson (2011) placement and readiness checklists for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Document analysis was used to analyze documents that provided information on the challenges hearing impaired students faced during English listening and speaking skill lessons. Therefore, teachers' lesson plans prepared for the months September to April were the subject of the document analysis. The

type of data the documents provided were the teacher's preparation to help both hearing and hearing impaired peers at the mainstream classroom. The purpose of analyzing these documents was to clearly identify how the teacher prepared lesson plans that could meet the needs of both hearing impaired and hearing peers. By using availability sampling technique the researcher used documents employed from September to April 2015/16 Academic year.

## **2.5 Method of Data Analysis**

The data that have been collected through interview, observation and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively. The units of analysis for the study were audio interviews, observation checklist records, and lesson plans. The data collected through the three instruments were analyzed thematically. The data collected, by the interpreter through aid apparatus, was transcribed and the transcript was translated into English by the researcher.

## **3. Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **3.1 Data Analysis**

In this part of the study data from observation, interview, and document analysis were analyzed and presented under the following three major themes: classroom setting and communication, teaching and learning English listening and speaking skill.

#### **3.1.1 General Classroom Setting and Communication**

##### **3.1.1.1 General Classroom Setting**

In Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School, students with hearing impairment were admitted to learn in the regular classrooms together with hearing peers. In grade nine, Section "L" 13 (6 male and 7 female) students were attending lessons of all subjects. Although inclusive education needed upgraded infrastructure, the school seemed to be merely named inclusive without special facilities that met the needs of both hearing and hearing impaired students. The classroom was the conventional classroom; It hadn't any special facility different from others classrooms. The teachers didn't have any adequate pre-service and in-service training about how to teach hearing impaired students. Textbooks were the regular textbooks that were published for regular students. The plasma broadcasting, which used to give a 20 minutes lessons, including an interpreter of sign language, was not functional since November 2015. With such type of situation, hearing



impaired students learn together with hearing peers under a similar setting. What's more, the teacher simultaneously taught students having different abilities. In this situation, it was possible to satisfy either the hearing or hearing-impaired students. An English teacher, and the interpreter and hearing impaired students counselor said that teachers who were teaching at the inclusive classroom usually left the class half-heartedly because they were unable to help the students.

### **3.1.1.2 Classroom Communication**

In inclusive classroom, communication is crucial and its impact is visible when giving and following directions, attending and comprehending classroom instructions, giving feedback, responding to questions and comments, discussing in groups and asking questions. Hearing impaired students in the inclusive classrooms are expected to have communication with their interpreter, teacher, peers and everyone else. However, in Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School ELT classrooms, hearing impaired students communicated only with their teacher and their peers. In ELT classrooms, there was no interpreter because in the school there was only one interpreter who was professionally teaching Mathematics. Despite the interpreter's profession, which was teaching mathematics, he was serving students in interpreting science subjects and counseling students with hearing impairment.

Regarding the absence of an interpreter in the ELT classroom, the counselor and interpreter of students with hearing impairment states,

*I used to interpret ELT classrooms. It was tiresome and unsuccessful because of two reasons. The first reason was I'm not familiar with English language teaching methodology and English language signs. The second reason, when the teacher speaks in English, I interpreted it in the Ethiopian Sign Language (Amharic), which created great confusion on the students (April 2016: Key Informant Interview).*

As it is stated above, although inclusive education had been applied in the school, the communication between hearing impaired students and the conventional teacher was not supported by interpreter. As one of the respondents stated:

*The reason was lack of professionals who can translate it into English or who can communicate in UK or USA sign languages. For that reason, the communication between the English teacher and the students was found to have three-steps: first the teacher gave direction orally; then the hearing students in the classroom started acting upon the given direction; and finally the hearing impaired students followed directions by observing others. This means students' with hearing impairment in the inclusive English listening and speaking skill classroom didn't follow directions independently. They were always following their classroom peers' activities though the direction was not clear to them. They imitated others actions in the classroom.*

The other aspect of communication in the classroom determined students' engagement in the activities. Students with hearing impairment were fully engaged and attending the classroom instructions. They watched actively every movement of the teacher towards the blackboard and wrote down whatever he wrote. Sometimes, they wrote only words, incomplete sentences in non-sense manner. These show the students were fully engaged in the writing activities of the teacher. One of the respondents of the study gave the following statement about the engagement he had in the classroom.

*I was fully engaged in the classroom since teachers entered the class. I was writing everything that the teacher wrote on the blackboard enthusiastically. Occasionally, I tried to see the notes of my hearing mates who sat next to me so that I could understand why the teacher wrote even a word. Therefore, I gave attention to every classroom activity.*

(Male profound hearing impaired student, April 2016: Key Informant Interview).

Like the profound hearing impaired student, the other students who can read lip or speech reading (severe hearing impaired) and used hearing aids (moderate hearing impaired) gave similar responses. However, the female profound hearing impaired students stated that sometimes she was not engaged in the lesson if it was not clear or if she missed certain points.

As a matter of fact, to strengthen how the students were engaged in their learning, the feedback to the teacher when the context was not clear was one

aspect. When the teacher wrote something, which was not clear to them, they looked at other students, for assistance. This means that hearing impaired students in different corners of the class communicated using sign language to make the point clear. They shout “Ahhh” to give cue for the teacher to look and offer help to them. Then, the teacher went to their desk and the student indicated the specific content that was not clear to him/her. This indicated that hearing impaired students recognized when certain information was misunderstood and how to ask for assistance.

Hearing impaired students’ classroom attention had relation with comprehension of classroom directions and lessons. The teacher usually used similar activities to make the instruction clear. According to the teacher’s weekly lesson plan, the objectives, the activities, and the approach he used were similar for all inclusive and non-inclusive classrooms. Particularly, during classroom observation the researcher identified that the teacher was employing similar activities. In classroom discussions, hearing impaired students had comprehended most familiar information regarding the activities. For example, they understood working in group as a group of six (two desks in one) though the teacher instructed to work in pairs.

Hearing impaired students were not active in classroom communication. They were disengaged when the teacher asked questions. Similarly, they were not providing comment on other students’ response and comments on learning activities. Moreover, in group discussion and cooperative learning they were attentive participant but not productive.

### **3.1.2 Communication Challenges of Teaching English Language to Hearing-Impaired Students**

The English teacher at Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School who had a two years’ experience of teaching English in an inclusive classroom perceived teaching as helpful for hearing impaired students without imposing extra challenge on their hearing peers. The teacher’s role in language teaching to hearing impaired students was important because the teacher tried to help by exerting maximum effort at the classroom though he didn’t have special preparation in terms of techniques of teaching the subject matter, teaching material and designing activities.

The teacher at the inclusive English classroom didn't have any special preparation to teach students with hearing impairment in that particular classroom setting. The teacher's weekly lesson plan showed the absence of this preparation. In the teacher's lesson plan, the following flaws were visible. First, the lesson plan for the inclusive classroom and the regular sections was similar. Second, the activities or expected activities were similar and redundant. Third, there was no teaching material or teaching aid throughout the lesson plans. Fourth, the lesson plans were not updated and session based; they were the replica of the first week plan. Therefore, in spite of having many roles in teaching English language to hearing impaired students, the teacher didn't have special support.

After having collected the data through observation and analyzing the teacher's weekly lesson plan, the researcher asked the teacher whether he was interested in teaching students with hearing impairment in the inclusive ELT classroom or not, and the teacher gave the following response:

*If English was not a compulsory subject, I would not teach hearing impaired students in ELT inclusive classroom. My reasons are the subject's complexness and the students' nature. This means, on one hand, language in general is complex to learn. English as a foreign language is too complex because it associated with knowledge, skill and culture of the language. On the other hand, the students' nature of keeping silence is not an inevitable condition for language teaching as language requires exposure, usage and drilling. (The English teacher, April 2016: Key Informant Interviewee).*

Moreover, the teacher in inclusive classroom did not get any training on how to teach English to hearing impaired students and hearing students simultaneously. He was implementing the conventional approaches of teaching he had been using for hearing students. Lack of awareness on how to teach students with hearing impairment leads to lack of interest and makes the teaching practice challenging. Based on the data the researcher has collected, the teacher has tried to help students like a lay person rather than professional though he was enforced to teach at the inclusive classroom.

In ELT inclusive classroom the teacher taught English to hearing impaired students though they had already lost their hearing. Thus, hearing impaired

students in inclusive classrooms were idle while their hearing peers learned how to listen and react on the instructions given by the teacher. Although students with hearing impairment were not interested to learn the language, it was mandatory to listen to learn. Therefore, when the teacher taught skills of language, he had to know the difficulties students face.

The challenges across teaching skills are varied. Listening skill is related to speaking skill in areas such as timing, rhythm, pauses, volume, intonation and others. However, the teacher at Biftu Nekemte inclusive classroom did not teach listening skills as part of English subject because of his own reasons.

*I have two reasons why I'm simply jumping the listening part of the subject or invite students to read at the class or at home. The first reason is that the newly published grade nine textbook incorporates the listening material at the end of the textbook (as an annex). So students prefer reading the listening activity text from their textbook instead of listening what their classmates or I read aloud. The second reason is teaching listening skills has to be media-supported. Hence, with the absence of media equipment to record and replay the listening text it is senseless because it is not different from the reading part of the subject (The English teacher, April 2016: Key Informant Interview).*

From the above statement it is clear that both hearing and hearing impaired student were not lucky to develop or learn the listening skills as part of the subject. All the skill areas that were expected to be acquired in the listening part were overlooked. Moreover, the teacher taught listening by writing on the blackboard using colored chalks.

However, for the sake of severely hearing impaired students, the teacher did the following. He opened the door and windows to get enough light. He spoke with a moderately recognizable pace. He made eye contact. Therefore, there was no environmental factor that hinders the student from lip reading.

In general, based on the data collected, teaching listening skills to students who were hearing impaired students was difficult and challenging. Some of the challenges the teacher faced were: 1) preparing audio-visual material that enabled hearing impaired students to see the pace, tone, pause, silence,

rhythm, timing and visual displays simultaneously, 2) preparing captions for every narrations, and 3) developing listening materials which were suitable for hearing impaired.

Teaching speaking skill to hearing impaired students was beyond the routine of teaching procedure because the students who were hearing were familiar with how to speak while hearing impaired students were not. Thus, in teaching speaking, the teacher faced a challenge to teach intonation, stress, and pronunciation. During the observation, the researcher realized that the teacher taught speaking skills by writing on the blackboard. What the teacher added in teaching speaking was using colored chalks to show stress and use a symbol (‘) to show how the words were pronounced.

In order to know about the importance the respondents perceive in teaching speaking skill for students who cannot speak, the researcher asked the interpreter and the hearing impaired students’ counselor. He addresses that speaking part of the subject is key because it provides an opportunity to learn how to communicate in through speaking with anyone who cannot use sign language. Consequently, teaching speaking skills is crucial. It needs to address how to teach speaking for both groups of students without benefiting one at the expense of the other.

The English teacher at inclusive classroom tried to teach the students by writing dialogues and conversations. There was no special teaching material for teaching of speaking skills. The teacher instructed the students to prepare a dialogue in their groups. In this situation, hearing impaired students were less engaged than the hearing peers. In the groups both hearing and hearing impaired students were working in the same group, the hearing impaired students were passive participants in the group. According to the English teacher, teaching speaking skills focused on writing. Regarding this, he stated that:

*Speaking part of the subject aims to enable students to orally communicate effectively. Despite the aim, I tried to teach hearing impaired students to communicate in a written form. This type of practice helps hearing impaired students to prepare for examinations in which speaking skills are presented in written forms. (The English teacher, April 2016: Key Informant Interviewee)*

Although the teacher helped the students to learn speaking skills in written forms, it was time taking and he was unable to help both groups simultaneously. In this occasion, hearing impaired students learned how to speak through writing while hearing peers learned through reading what their teacher wrote, instead of preparing their own dialogue or conversation. This benefited one group at the expense of the other. When it was compared with the situations hearing impaired students were in, the moderate hearing impaired student were able to speak more than the severe and profound hearing impaired students. That was why the teacher used the moderate hearing impaired students as supporters to teach speaking skill to others.

The teacher faced challenges during teaching speaking skills using different approach to both hearing and hearing impaired students: writing everything on the blackboard, teaching how to pronounce words, helping each student write their own conversation, preparing captions and audio as a teaching aid; and compensating for hearing impairment by using sign language.

### **3.1.3 Communication Challenges Hearing Impaired Students Faced in Inclusive English Language Classrooms**

Hearing impaired students at Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary School had similar educational background. They started learning English from pre-elementary level at the boarding school, which was established and run by Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Eyesus. Starting from the boarding school to the end of the primary education, it was special needs education in which hearing impaired students had learnt in exclusive classroom. They had teachers who were professionals in teaching Ethiopian and USA Sign Languages and the subject matter.

After joining grade nine in the inclusive classroom setting, environmental and teacher related factors started to make the learning environment tougher. Although hearing impaired students felt about how to cope with their academic activities, compared with the hearing peers, they were free because hearing peers in the classroom were friendly and supportive. Every hearing student in the classroom was enthusiastic to help the hearing impaired peers.

Regarding English language, most of the students like the English subject. During their primary school at the boarding school their medium of communication was English because their teachers were foreign

missionaries. They were using English inside and outside the classroom. In the secondary school, the knowledge of English was everything to them to learn any subjects. That was why they believed they learnt English though it was not compulsory subject.

Despite students' interest and experience of learning English, the transition from special needs education to inclusive education was challenging. To familiarize oneself with the hearing peers, hearing teachers and lack of facilities in the classrooms were challenging. The books the students used, and the teachers who taught them were new to them. In the words of a female profound hearing impaired student "*the school was like market for us because you see a lot of people but no communication*" (April 2016: Key Informant Interview).

The profound hearing impaired students were not interested to learn listening skills; Nevertheless, the severe hearing impaired student was interested to learn how to listen. A student who could 'listen' by lip reading stated that he was very interested when people were speaking. In his ability to read the speech via lip movement, the way the speakers speak, and the facial expression was interesting. From this it could be elicited that listening was beyond getting verbal messages.

The moderate hearing impaired student stated that he was familiar with the relationship between volume and listening. When people speak loudly, but not shout, he can listen. The pauses were also clear to him. He stated, "*I'm always eager to listen not what people say but how people say something*" (April 2016: Key Informant Interview).

The severe and the moderate hearing impaired students have a little opportunity to learn listening skills. Unlike them the profound hearing impaired students didn't listen or speak. Profound hearing impaired students couldn't identify any type of sound. In general, they were not subject to listening and aural skills.

Generally, students with hearing impairment, especially non-profound hearing impaired students, faced the challenges of keeping attention throughout the class, writing and listening at the same time, listening what the hearing students asked and responded in the classroom, coping with the speed of the speaker, differentiating similar syllables, connecting meaning



across sentence, and identifying when the speech started and ended during exercising listening skill at the EFL inclusive classroom.

Like listening, hearing impaired students in one or another way had faced communication challenge because of speaking. Since childhood speaking develops via imitating what has been said. People who are disabled are challenged when they learn speaking. A severe and moderate hearing impaired students tried to speak but the skill was not present. The challenges they faced to speak were substitution of consonants that had the same syllabi such as “B” and “P”, omission of letters such as “*prent*” to say “Present” and transposition of letters. Thus, whenever they try to speak they faced these challenges.

Profound hearing impaired students were not familiar to voice making, except “Ahhh”-a cue to call, to get attention, and to tell. Voice making was challenging for them. In addition to voice making, profound hearing impaired students do not understand how people speak or make utterances. They believed that oral skill was not easy to learn. According to the male profound hearing impaired student:

*Learning speaking skill is essential in language endeavors. However, there are no speaking skill exercises except side talking in the classroom. Also, during examination the speaking parts are prepared via writing. Thus, there is no greater difference between the hearing students and us. When I read the textbook about speaking skill in some places, it invites me to use different audio materials though it is not applied by the teacher (April 2016: Key Informant Interview).*

From his statement it can be understood that speaking parts of the subject were not associated and supported by the necessary accessories and teaching aids. Besides, the speaking activities the teacher gave at the classroom were labeled as “side talk,” which was totally against the objectives of the lesson.

Students who had hearing impairments faced many challenges in learning speaking skills. Some of the challenges were inability to make appropriate voice for a certain utterance, recognizing how the skill was associated with sign language, pronouncing words, and attitude of students towards the purpose of teaching speaking skills to hearing impaired students.

### **3.2 Discussions**

Similar to Demisew (2014), Abebe (2000) also confirmed that there is no smooth relationship between the two groups of students because of communication problems and feeling of incompetence. Abebe's finding is totally opposite to the findings in this study. Communication can be a barrier to have relationship but it cannot be a factor to impair the relationship. The communication barrier may lead to poor interaction as Nitsuh (2008) discussed or lack of motivation to create relationship as Tewodros (2014) argued. However, lack of necessary skills, understanding, and resource as well as inappropriate organization is prevalent. Practically, in this study, it was found that hearing impaired students were more sociable and friendly while their hearing peers were helpful without having the sense of incompetence between them.

In the implementation of inclusive education in the Ethiopian context both teacher and resource related factors are the cause of various challenges. Demisew (2014) found out the following challenges to implement inclusive education. These include: inflexible curriculum, problems of language and communication, and lack of human resource. Similar to UNESCO (2005) and Demisew's (2014) findings, the teacher related problems were fundamental in Biftu Nekemte inclusive classroom. The regular English teacher taught both hearing and hearing impaired students without having basic training on how to help hearing impaired students in the inclusive classroom. The other problem was the inappropriate organization of the school. The school had implemented inclusive education without having sufficient organization in human resource and facilities. Regarding qualified human resource, in some countries like Jordan inclusive classroom for the hearing impaired students has got special service offered by qualified and skilled teachers to respond to their unique needs (El-Zraigot and Smadi, 2012). Although this is the experience of Jordan, the researcher found out that there was no qualified and skilled teacher to teach English listening and speaking skills to hearing impaired students at Biftu Nekemte inclusive classroom. This can be related to the separation of qualification to teach English language for regular hearing students but does not have the skill to teach English to hearing impaired students.

Therefore, regarding the teacher related problems this study has come out with similar findings with Nitsuh (2008). The barriers to implement inclusive education successfully include insufficient preparation of the teacher, rigid and poor teaching methods, and lack of need identification process. According to the National Deaf Children's Society (2004) and Lazanova (2009), teachers must have specialist knowledge about hearing impairment. Thus, they must plan effectively to teach them. However, in the study it was found that the English teacher had no specialist knowledge and preparation, or he didn't have plan to help students with hearing impairment.

Regarding facility, as the African Child Policy Forum (2011) found, inclusive classrooms are physically inaccessible. According to the World Health Organization (2015), amplification system, interpreter, captioned films, assistance of a note taker, alternative communication methods, and counseling are among the facilities. In Biftu Nekemte inclusive classroom none of these facilities were available in ELT classroom. The alternative plasma broadcasting was not functional. There was no sign language interpreter in ELT classroom. In this study the researcher found out that the inclusive education practiced at Biftu Nekemte Senior Secondary school was out of Lipsky and Gartner (1997) inclusive education models. According to them, inclusive education has three models; consultant, teaming and collaborative teaching. These models are based on the relationship between the subject teacher and the interpreter. But, in this study it was found out that these inclusive education models were not implemented in ELT inclusive classroom.

In relation to language teaching and learning, Tilahun (2005) states that hearing impairment affects speech development of students. The researcher found out that to bring speech development to hearing impaired students was unattainable. The reason is that as Osberger (1986) states teaching both receptive and productive language skills is challenging for teacher and students. The study found out that listening from the receptive skills and speaking from the productive skills are more challenging part of teaching English.

Teaching listening skill to hearing impaired students in general and profound hearing impaired student in particular is difficult. As Abrahms (2008) states sign language interference is crucial in teaching listening. In this study it was

found out that there was no sign language interpreter in ELT classroom. In teaching and learning speaking skill, the problem of making voice was highly visible. As Hoferkova (2012) found that hearing impaired students cannot automatically reproduce voice through vocalization. With moderate and severe hearing impaired students, it was observed that, there was a problem of substitution of consonants, sound omissions and transposition of letters. However, it was not highly existent as Lazanova (2009) stated. The reason was that most of the students in the classroom were profound hearing impaired and they were not trying to speak.

#### **4. Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations**

##### **4.1 Summary of Findings**

Although teaching English language to hearing impaired students in inclusive classroom demands special preparation and diverse approaches, at Biftu Nekemte inclusive EFL classroom, there was no any special preparation to teach hearing impaired students. Teacher and facility related problems were the challenges to implement inclusive education in EFL classroom. Teachers were supposed to teach hearing impaired students at least with the support of the sign language interpreter to minimize communication challenges. However, there was no sign language interpreter in EFL classroom and the class had been taking place with a regular class teacher. The teacher also didn't have any special preparation in choosing methods of teaching, preparing activities, and selecting and designing teaching material. In a nutshell, both the teacher and the students faced communication challenges in the teaching and learning practice. The challenges were different across language skills.

The challenges the teacher faced in teaching English language to students with hearing impairment were associated with absences in preparing audio-visual material that could enable students to see the pace, tone, pause, silence, rhythm and timing; captions for every narrations; and teaching aids, and teaching how to pronounce words.

On the students' side, students with hearing impairment faced challenges in EFL inclusive classroom. Moderate and severe hearing impaired students faced the challenges of paying attention throughout the class, coping with the speaker's speed and connecting meaning across sentence in learning

listening (lip reading) skills. In learning speaking, hearing impaired students faced challenges when they made voice and pronounce words.

#### **4.2 Conclusion**

Based on the above discussion and summary of the findings, the study draws the following conclusions:

- The implementation of inclusive education in Biftu Nekemte, EFL classroom was merely placement of hearing impaired students in the regular hearing students' (mainstream) classrooms.
- With the absence of sign language interpreter, the practice of inclusive education in EFL classrooms created communication intermission between the teachers and their students.
- The inclusion of hearing impaired students in English language classes was highly challenging. As a result, there was lack of skills from the teacher's side to teach hearing impaired students.
- The inclusive education at Biftu Nekemte made teaching and learning English language challenging for both the teacher and the students.

#### **4.3 Recommendations**

Based on the above conclusion, the researcher stated the following recommendations:

- Before the implementation of inclusive education the facilities and teacher related aspects should be reorganized to transform conventional classroom facilities and teachers to classrooms suitable for the hearing impaired.
- To solve the communication intermission, English language classrooms should have sign language interpreters. In addition to this, in-service training programs should be planned for language teachers and be part of the improvement program.
- An English teacher has the qualification of how to teach English to regular students. However, he/she does not have the skills to teach hearing impaired students. Therefore, teacher education institutions need to incorporate the methodology for teaching hearing impaired students in their curriculum.
- In order to improve the students' language skills and to lessen the communication challenges facing the teachers when teaching language

to the hearing impaired, well-equipped hearing impairment resource center should be established and give service to aid language learning.

- Facilities and human resources development programs should be carefully planned to minimize the challenges teachers face when they teach language teaching to hearing impaired students.

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