

Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness: The Role of Persons with Hearing and Speech Impairment in Leadership Participation and Decision-Making Structures

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>This study explored inclusive leadership and organisational success, focusing on hearing and speech-impaired people in leadership and decision-making. Despite global diversity and inclusion advocacy, people with communication impairments are under-represented in organisational governance. The study examined the barriers to leadership engagement among people with hearing and speech impairments, the enabling variables that promote inclusion, and the influence of inclusive leadership on organisational effectiveness. The Social Model of Disability, Inclusive Leadership Theory, and Human Capital Theory underpinned the study. A case study-based qualitative research design was used. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observational insights with hearing and speech-impaired people and organisational stakeholders collected data. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to discover leadership participation, accessibility, organisational culture, and effectiveness themes. Communication difficulties, inaccessible organisational processes, discriminatory attitudes, insufficient policy execution, and exclusion from informal workplace networks greatly limited leadership engagement among hearing and speech-impaired people. The study also revealed that accessible communication methods, supportive leadership, inclusive workplace culture, mentorship opportunities, and assistive technologies increased organisational decision-making involvement and inclusion. The study also showed that inclusive leadership improved creativity, employee engagement, collaboration, communication efficiency, and institutional legitimacy. The study found institutional rather than impairment-based exclusion of hearing and speech-impaired people from leadership positions. It confirmed that inclusive leadership is a key organisational and social justice requirement. Therefore, the study proposed complete accessibility policies, inclusive leadership development programmes, workplace disability sensitisation programmes, and enhanced disability inclusion enforcement. Insight into communication-related deficits in organisational leadership and governance is added to the literature.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Inclusive Leadership, Organizational Effectiveness, Persons with Hearing and Speech Impairment, Leadership Participation, Decision-Making Structures.</i></p>
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Introduction

Modern organisational studies emphasise inclusive leadership, which is more participatory, equitable, and diversity-sensitive than hierarchical and exclusionary (Ludwig et al., 2022). Inclusive leadership promotes recognising, valuing, and integrating varied identities, experiences, and competencies in organisational structures,

especially decision-making. A globalised, knowledge-driven economy where diversity and inclusion fuel innovation, flexibility, and organisational resilience makes this paradigm more relevant. Even though disability inclusion is rising, people with hearing and speech impairments are still marginalised in leadership and

governance frameworks.

Due to the importance of communication in leadership, hearing and speech impairments present specific issues in organisations. Leadership involves active engagement in meetings, negotiations, and strategic discussions, which rely largely on verbal and aural communication (Nurohman, 2025). Thus, structural constraints limit leadership chances for those with such impairments. These functional constraints are rooted in company cultures, rules, and attitudes that favour normative communication. These limitations indicate structural exclusion that hinders fairness and inclusivity. The social model of disability, which holds that disability is caused by societal and institutional barriers to participation, explains the marginalisation of hearing and speech-impaired leaders. In this context, organisations without accessible communication channels, assistive technologies, or inclusive decision-making disable people with such impairments (Setiawan, 2024). This perspective challenges deficit-oriented ideas and requires companies to change systems and processes to accommodate varied requirements.

Inclusive leadership improves employee engagement, innovation, and decision-making, according to empirical studies. Diverse leadership teams will explore additional views, resulting in more robust and inventive solutions. The literature on diversity and inclusion has mostly concentrated on gender and race, with little on disability, especially communication-related disabilities. This gap ignores a large portion of the workforce whose contributions could boost organisational performance. The limited research on disability inclusion focus on general employment rather than leadership engagement, ignoring the importance of governance and decision-making frameworks in organisational success.

Thus, this study addresses the under-representation and limited engagement of hearing and speech-impaired people in organisational leadership and decision-making. Under-representation raises equity and social justice concerns and affects organisational performance. Organisations may impede creativity and adaptive problem-solving by barring varied communicators. The lack of inclusive leadership models fosters exclusion by limiting role models, mentorship, and leadership development for people with disabilities.

This study examines how hearing and speech-impaired people participate in leadership and decision-making structures and how their inclusion or exclusion affects organisational effectiveness. The study's objectives are to identify structural, cultural, and communicative barriers to leadership participation among people with hearing and speech impairments, explore enabling factors and

organisational practises that enable their inclusion, and assess the impact of inclusive leadership on organisational effectiveness. The study asks: What impediments prevent hearing and speech-impaired people from leading? What methods encourage their participation in decision-making? How does their participation affect organisational results? Three things make this study important. Integrating disability studies ideas into inclusive leadership research fills a vacuum in the field. It gives organisations evidence-based advice on how to improve inclusion and diversity leadership. The paper provides policy recommendations to help build and execute inclusive policies and frameworks, especially in undeveloped disability inclusion environments.

In conclusion, inclusive leadership is a strategic imperative for organisational efficiency, not only a normative ideal. It focuses on the experiences and contributions of people with hearing and speech impairments to better understand inclusion in leadership and demonstrate the transformative power of fully inclusive decision-making frameworks.

Literature Review

The conceptual and theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on the relationship between inclusive leadership, disability inclusion, leadership participation, and organisational effectiveness. These concepts provide the intellectual basis for understanding how organisations can create equitable decision-making structures that accommodate persons with hearing and speech impairments. The section also examines the theoretical perspectives that explain the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within organisational systems.

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership refers to a leadership approach that actively values diversity, ensures equitable participation, and creates an environment where all individuals feel respected, heard, and empowered to contribute to organisational processes. Unlike traditional leadership models that often reinforce hierarchy and uniformity, inclusive leadership emphasises collaboration, openness, accessibility, and shared decision-making. Inclusive leaders recognise differences in ability, communication style, and lived experience as strategic assets rather than limitations (Kiikkilä, 2021).

Scholars such as Jean Lipman-Blumen argue that inclusive leadership is characterised by empathy, responsiveness, and the ability to integrate marginalised voices into organisational dialogue. Similarly, studies on workplace diversity indicate that inclusive leadership strengthens employee trust, promotes psychological safety, and enhances innovation. Within the context of hearing and speech impairments, inclusive leadership involves ensuring

accessible communication systems, encouraging participation in governance structures, and eliminating discriminatory organisational practices that restrict leadership opportunities.

The concept is particularly significant because leadership participation extends beyond occupying formal managerial positions. It includes involvement in strategic planning, policy discussions, committee representation, and organisational governance. Therefore, inclusion in leadership must encompass both representation and meaningful participation in decision-making structures.

Organisational Effectiveness

Organisational effectiveness refers to the extent to which an organisation achieves its goals efficiently while maintaining adaptability, employee satisfaction, and long-term sustainability (Holbeche, 2018). Traditional measures of effectiveness focused largely on profitability and productivity; however, contemporary organisational theory increasingly incorporates dimensions such as employee well-being, innovation, diversity, and institutional legitimacy.

Research demonstrates that organisations with inclusive cultures often outperform those with exclusionary systems because diversity contributes to broader perspectives, improved problem-solving, and enhanced creativity. Inclusive decision-making structures allow organisations to benefit from varied experiences and alternative viewpoints, which are essential in dynamic and competitive environments (Bell & Reed, 2022). In this regard, the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments can enrich organisational processes by introducing unique communicative and experiential perspectives that may otherwise be absent.

Furthermore, organisational effectiveness is closely linked to employee engagement and belongingness. Employees who perceive organisational systems as fair and inclusive are more likely to demonstrate commitment, collaboration, and productivity. Conversely, exclusionary practices can create dissatisfaction, reduce morale, and weaken institutional performance.

Hearing and Speech Impairment in Organisational Contexts

Hearing impairment refers to partial or complete loss of hearing that affects an individual's ability to receive auditory information, while speech impairment involves difficulties in verbal expression, articulation, or communication fluency (Schöttle et al., 2019). These impairments vary in severity and may require different forms of accommodation, including sign language interpretation, captioning technologies, speech-generating

devices, or alternative communication methods.

Within organisational settings, communication remains central to leadership and administration. Meetings, presentations, interviews, negotiations, and interpersonal interactions are often designed around spoken communication norms. As a result, individuals with hearing and speech impairments frequently experience barriers that limit their participation. These barriers may be structural, such as the absence of assistive technologies; cultural, such as stereotypes about competence; or institutional, such as exclusionary recruitment and promotion policies (Nierling & Maia, 2020).

Importantly, these challenges are not necessarily caused by the impairments themselves but by organisational systems that fail to accommodate diversity. This distinction is essential because it shifts the focus from individual limitations to institutional responsibility. Organisations that provide accessible communication channels and inclusive governance systems are more likely to benefit from the leadership potential of persons with disabilities.

Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability serves as one of the principal theoretical foundations of this study. Developed in opposition to the medical model, the social model argues that disability is primarily created by societal barriers rather than individual impairments. Under the medical model, disability is viewed as a personal deficit requiring treatment or correction (Zaks, 2024). In contrast, the social model contends that exclusion results from inaccessible environments, discriminatory attitudes, and institutional structures that fail to accommodate diversity.

This theory is highly relevant to the experiences of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership contexts. Organisational systems that depend exclusively on oral communication, fail to provide interpreters, or exclude alternative communication methods effectively marginalise individuals with such impairments (Aldè et al., 2025). According to the social model, the problem therefore lies not in the impairment itself but in the organisation's inability or unwillingness to adapt its structures.

The social model also supports the argument that inclusion should move beyond token representation towards meaningful participation. Merely employing persons with disabilities without ensuring their active involvement in leadership and governance processes does not constitute genuine inclusion. Instead, organisations must create enabling environments where diverse forms of communication and participation are recognised as legitimate and valuable.

Inclusive Leadership Theory

Inclusive Leadership Theory emphasises the responsibility of leaders to create environments where diversity is respected and all members are empowered to contribute meaningfully. The theory highlights characteristics such as openness, accessibility, fairness, collaboration, and recognition of individual uniqueness. Inclusive leaders are expected to reduce power imbalances and foster participation from groups that are traditionally marginalised.

In relation to this study, the theory provides a framework for understanding how organisational leaders can either facilitate or hinder the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments. Leaders who fail to prioritise accessibility may unintentionally reinforce exclusion, while those who adopt inclusive practices can promote equitable participation in decision-making processes (Mullin et al., 2021).

The theory further suggests that inclusion is not only a moral responsibility but also a strategic advantage. Organisations that embrace inclusive leadership are better positioned to attract diverse talent, improve employee commitment, and strengthen institutional performance. Thus, inclusive leadership theory establishes the connection between disability inclusion and organisational effectiveness (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Inclusive Leadership and Organisational Effectiveness

Inclusive leadership has gained increasing scholarly attention because diversity and inclusion are now recognised as essential to organisational success. Traditional leadership models were largely hierarchical and based on standardised communication systems and homogeneous workplace cultures. However, modern organisations operate within complex and diverse environments that require leadership approaches capable of integrating different perspectives and experiences. Inclusive leadership therefore emerged as a response to exclusionary systems that marginalised minority groups, including persons with disabilities (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Inclusive leadership is generally defined as a leadership style characterised by openness, accessibility, fairness, empathy, and encouragement of employee participation in organisational processes. Inclusive leaders create environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel respected, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully. Research shows that employees are more committed and innovative when leadership structures are perceived as inclusive and equitable.

A growing body of literature links inclusive leadership to organisational effectiveness. Organisational effectiveness refers to an organisation's ability to achieve its goals

efficiently while maintaining adaptability, employee satisfaction, and sustainability. Studies indicate that inclusive organisations often experience improved collaboration, higher employee morale, reduced workplace conflict, and better decision-making outcomes. Diversity within leadership structures also broadens perspectives and reduces the risk of groupthink (Jonasson & Lauring, 2026).

The literature further associates inclusive leadership with innovation. Employees are more likely to share ideas and contribute creatively when they feel psychologically safe and free from discrimination. Inclusive leadership encourages participation from underrepresented groups, thereby strengthening organisational adaptability and competitiveness.

Despite these benefits, many organisations continue to approach inclusion symbolically rather than structurally. Diversity initiatives are often limited to recruitment without ensuring equal participation in leadership and governance processes (Davenport et al., 2022). Scholars also note that inclusive leadership research has focused mainly on gender and ethnicity while paying limited attention to disability inclusion, particularly communication-related impairments (Shore et al., 2018).

Overall, the literature establishes inclusive leadership as both an ethical and strategic necessity for organisational effectiveness. However, limited research exists on how persons with hearing and speech impairments participate within leadership and decision-making structures. This gap highlights the need for further study on disability-inclusive leadership practices and organisational participation.

Disability Inclusion in Leadership

Disability inclusion refers to the deliberate integration of persons with disabilities into social, economic, political, and organisational systems in ways that ensure equal participation, access, and opportunity. Within organisations, disability inclusion extends beyond physical accessibility to include equitable representation in leadership, governance, and decision-making processes. Despite increasing global advocacy for disability rights, persons with disabilities remain underrepresented in leadership positions across many institutions.

Historically, disability was viewed through charitable and medical perspectives that portrayed persons with disabilities as dependent individuals rather than capable contributors to organisational development (Withers, 2024). These perspectives reinforced exclusionary practices that limited access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities. Although disability rights movements have challenged these assumptions, many organisations continue to operate within systems influenced by such outdated beliefs.

International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities advocate equal participation, accessibility, and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities. Many countries have also established policies promoting workplace inclusion. However, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in developing countries where institutional resources and enforcement mechanisms are limited.

Research identifies several barriers affecting disability inclusion in leadership. Persistent stereotypes often associate disability with incompetence or reduced productivity, influencing recruitment, promotion, and leadership selection processes. For persons with hearing and speech impairments, communication differences are frequently misinterpreted as limitations in leadership ability, despite evidence that effective leadership depends on broader competencies such as strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills.

Organisational accessibility also remains a major concern. Leadership activities often involve communication-intensive tasks such as meetings, presentations, and negotiations. Organisations that fail to provide interpreters, captioning services, or assistive communication technologies effectively exclude persons with hearing and speech impairments from meaningful participation (Dobusch, 2021).

The literature further highlights the importance of representation in promoting inclusion. Visible leaders with disabilities can challenge stereotypes, encourage institutional change, and inspire confidence among employees. Scholars also argue that disability inclusion should not be viewed solely as a moral obligation but as a strategic advantage because persons with disabilities often contribute resilience, adaptability, and innovative perspectives to organisational decision-making (Penney, 2023).

Despite growing advocacy, research specifically examining the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership remains limited, creating a need for further study on inclusive organisational governance and communication accessibility.

Hearing and Speech Impairment in Organisational Contexts

Hearing and speech impairments significantly shape individuals' experiences within organisational environments, particularly regarding communication, participation, and leadership engagement. Communication is central to organisational operations and influences interactions between employees, management, and stakeholders (Rajhans, 2018). Consequently, persons with hearing and speech impairments often face barriers that

affect their inclusion, especially within leadership and decision-making contexts where communication is frequently associated with verbal fluency and auditory responsiveness.

Individuals with hearing and speech impairments use diverse communication methods such as sign language, lip reading, written communication, assistive technologies, and speech-generating devices. However, many organisations continue to operate primarily through conventional spoken communication systems, creating environments that disadvantage individuals whose communication styles differ from dominant norms. Formal workplace interactions such as meetings, interviews, training sessions, and strategic discussions are often conducted without accommodations like interpreters, captioning services, or assistive technologies, thereby limiting meaningful participation.

Organisational culture also plays an important role in shaping workplace experiences. Cultures that value speed, verbal assertiveness, and oral presentation skills may unintentionally marginalise persons with communication impairments (Ghuman, 2024). Leadership potential is frequently linked to public speaking ability, reinforcing stereotypes that persons with hearing and speech impairments are unsuitable for leadership roles. Such assumptions ignore other essential leadership qualities including strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and decision-making competence.

The literature further highlights issues of stigma and discrimination. Employers may perceive communication impairments as barriers to teamwork, customer relations, or organisational representation, thereby affecting recruitment, promotion, and leadership opportunities. Institutional structures may also reinforce exclusion through inaccessible policies, communication systems, and performance evaluations favouring dominant communication styles (Bukar et al., 2025). Additionally, exclusion from informal workplace networks often limits access to mentorship and leadership development opportunities.

Despite these challenges, inclusive communication practices and technological advancements such as real-time captioning, speech-to-text applications, and digital collaboration tools have improved accessibility. Research also shows that persons with hearing and speech impairments often develop adaptive strengths such as resilience, creativity, and strong non-verbal communication skills (Carter, 2019).

However, existing literature focuses largely on employment access rather than leadership participation, leaving limited understanding of how persons with hearing and speech

impairments engage within organisational governance and decision-making structures. This highlights the need for further research on inclusive leadership and communication accessibility.

Participation in Decision-Making Structures

Participation in decision-making structures is a vital aspect of inclusive leadership and democratic organisational governance. Decision-making structures include executive boards, management committees, departmental meetings, and policy forums through which organisational strategies and policies are developed and implemented (Joseph & Gaba, 2020). Participation in these systems determines whose perspectives influence organisational direction and whose interests are represented within institutional processes.

Contemporary organisational theory recognises that effective decision-making benefits from diversity of thought and experience. Inclusive governance structures enhance creativity, reduce bias, and improve organisational legitimacy because decisions reflect the needs of diverse stakeholders. Exclusion from decision-making therefore affects not only individuals but also organisational effectiveness and innovation.

For persons with hearing and speech impairments, participation is often influenced by communication accessibility (Fraser-Barbour et al., 2025). Many organisational meetings depend heavily on spoken interaction, rapid discussions, and unstructured communication, creating barriers for individuals who rely on sign language interpretation, written communication, or assistive technologies. Without adequate accommodations, meaningful participation becomes limited.

The literature identifies both formal and informal barriers to participation. Formal barriers include inaccessible meeting formats, absence of interpreters, and lack of captioning services, while informal barriers involve stereotypes, social exclusion, and workplace power dynamics (Yabu et al., 2026). In some cases, persons with hearing and speech impairments may be physically present in meetings but unable to contribute effectively due to inaccessible communication systems. This results in symbolic rather than substantive inclusion.

Scholars further argue that leadership structures often privilege dominant communication norms, thereby marginalising persons with communication impairments (Jenkins & Kim Webster, 2021). Genuine inclusion therefore requires more than physical presence; it involves the ability to influence discussions, contribute ideas, and participate fully in organisational governance. Tokenistic representation without meaningful authority undermines true participation (Petriwskyj, 2018).

Technology has improved accessibility through tools such as captioning systems, digital communication platforms, and real-time transcription services (Kuhn et al., 2025). However, technology alone cannot guarantee inclusion without supportive organisational attitudes and policies.

Overall, the literature shows that meaningful participation in decision-making structures is essential for inclusive leadership and organisational effectiveness. Yet persons with hearing and speech impairments continue to face communication and structural barriers that restrict full engagement within organisational governance systems.

Critique of Existing Literature and Identified Research Gaps

Existing literature on inclusive leadership, disability inclusion, and organisational effectiveness highlights the importance of diversity, participation, and accessibility within organisational systems (Mishra & Tiwari, 2024). Scholars generally agree that inclusive workplace cultures enhance innovation, employee engagement, institutional legitimacy, and organisational sustainability. Disability studies have also contributed significantly to understanding the structural and social barriers faced by persons with disabilities in educational and workplace environments. However, despite these contributions, important gaps remain regarding the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership and decision-making structures.

One major limitation of existing scholarship is its strong emphasis on general workforce inclusion rather than leadership participation (Schoenberg et al., 2024). Most studies focus on employment access, recruitment, workplace accommodation, and anti-discrimination policies, while giving limited attention to governance, influence, and strategic decision-making roles. Consequently, there is inadequate understanding of how persons with hearing and speech impairments experience organisational leadership structures.

Another weakness is the tendency to treat persons with disabilities as a homogenous group. Many studies fail to distinguish between different forms of impairment and their unique organisational implications. Communication-related impairments present distinct challenges linked to interaction patterns and organisational communication systems, yet these experiences are often overlooked. As a result, limited research specifically addresses how hearing and speech impairments affect leadership participation and decision-making processes.

The literature also demonstrates geographical imbalance. Most empirical studies originate from Western societies where legal protections, accessibility technologies, and inclusion frameworks are relatively advanced. These

findings may not fully reflect the realities of developing countries such as Nigeria, where disability inclusion is influenced by stigma, infrastructural limitations, and weak policy implementation. Research addressing these contextual realities remains insufficient.

Methodologically, many organisational inclusion studies rely heavily on quantitative approaches such as surveys and performance metrics (van Berkel & Breit, 2026). While useful for identifying trends, such methods often fail to capture lived experiences, communication barriers, stigma, and workplace exclusion. This creates a need for more qualitative studies capable of providing deeper contextual understanding.

Theoretical gaps are also evident. Inclusive leadership theories emphasise participation and fairness but often overlook communication accessibility and alternative interaction systems used by persons with hearing and speech impairments. Similarly, Human Capital Theory focuses on economic productivity while paying limited attention to structural inequalities and discrimination (Marginson, 2019).

Additional gaps include limited attention to tokenistic inclusion, informal workplace relationships, assistive technologies, and intersectionality. Existing studies rarely examine whether organisational representation leads to genuine authority and influence or how factors such as gender and socio-economic background intersect with disability experiences.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership and decision-making structures and evaluating how such inclusion influences organisational effectiveness within contemporary organisational contexts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the role of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership participation and decision-making structures, as well as the influence of their inclusion on organisational effectiveness. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on experiences, perceptions, organisational practices, and social interactions that cannot be adequately understood through numerical analysis. The study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which views social reality as shaped by human experiences, meanings, and interactions. A case study strategy is employed to enable an in-depth exploration of organisational inclusion within real-life institutional contexts, while phenomenological elements help capture the lived experiences of participants regarding communication barriers, accessibility, and leadership

participation.

The target population includes persons with hearing and speech impairments employed in organisations and involved in leadership or decision-making activities, as well as human resource managers, supervisors, and administrators responsible for inclusion policies. Organisations from sectors such as education, healthcare, public administration, and private enterprises are selected. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques are used to identify participants with relevant experiences. Data saturation is expected within approximately 15–25 participants.

Data collection involves semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and limited observational insights. Interviews provide detailed accounts of organisational experiences and are conducted using accessible communication methods such as sign language interpreters, written responses, or assistive technologies where necessary. Organisational documents, including inclusion policies and governance frameworks, are analysed to compare official practices with participants' experiences.

Data is analysed using thematic analysis through coding, categorisation, and identification of recurring themes. Credibility is ensured through triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity. Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for accessibility needs. Overall, the methodology provides a comprehensive and inclusive framework for understanding leadership participation among persons with hearing and speech impairments.

Findings and Discussion

Barriers to Leadership Participation

The findings of this study reveal that persons with hearing and speech impairments continue to face multiple barriers that restrict their participation in leadership and decision-making structures within organisations. These barriers operate at structural, institutional, communicative, and socio-cultural levels. Although some organisations have adopted inclusion policies, significant gaps remain between policy intentions and practical implementation.

Communication inaccessibility emerged as one of the major barriers. Participants reported that meetings, strategic discussions, and organisational forums were often conducted without sign language interpreters, captioning systems, or assistive technologies, thereby limiting meaningful participation (Davies & Desai, 2025). Some participants were physically present during meetings but unable to fully follow discussions because communication systems were inaccessible.

The findings also indicate that leadership is frequently

associated with verbal fluency and oral communication skills. Consequently, participants with hearing and speech impairments were sometimes viewed as less capable of leadership despite possessing relevant qualifications and competence. These perceptions reflected broader stereotypes linking disability with reduced productivity and competence.

Institutional barriers were also evident. Many organisations lacked effective accessibility policies or failed to implement disability inclusion frameworks adequately (Bila & Lawal, 2023). Accessibility efforts often focused mainly on physical infrastructure while neglecting communication accessibility. Participants further reported exclusion from informal workplace networks, mentorship opportunities, and social interactions that influence career advancement.

Psychological effects such as reduced confidence, anxiety, and feelings of marginalisation were also identified, resulting largely from repeated experiences of exclusion and misunderstanding within workplace environments (Nadal et al., 2021). In addition, technological and financial limitations restricted access to assistive communication tools in some organisations.

Overall, the findings support the Social Model of Disability, which argues that exclusion results primarily from inaccessible systems and discriminatory organisational practices rather than individual impairments (Meisenbach & Hutchins, 2020).

Enablers of Inclusive Leadership Participation

Despite the barriers identified, the study found several enabling factors that support the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership and decision-making structures. These factors highlight the importance of organisational commitment, accessibility, leadership support, and inclusive culture.

Accessible communication systems were a major enabler. Participants reported that the availability of sign language interpreters, captioning services, visual aids, and digital communication tools significantly improved their ability to engage in meetings and decision-making processes (Morton et al., 2020). Such accommodations enhanced participation, confidence, and inclusion.

Supportive leadership also played a crucial role. Participants experienced better inclusion in organisations where leaders demonstrated openness, empathy, and willingness to adapt communication methods. Inclusive leaders encouraged participation and ensured that accessibility needs were considered in decision-making processes.

Organisational culture further influenced inclusion.

Workplaces characterised by respect, diversity awareness, and collaboration reduced stigma and encouraged engagement. Disability sensitisation and awareness training were identified as important tools for improving attitudes (Kulkarni et al., 2018).

Mentorship and professional development opportunities also enhanced leadership participation by providing guidance, visibility, and skill development. In addition, technology such as virtual platforms and speech-to-text tools improved accessibility and communication flexibility (Nnagbo, 2023).

Legal and policy frameworks supported inclusion when properly implemented, although participants emphasised that policies must be matched with practical action. Personal resilience and adaptive skills were also noted as strengths, but participants stressed that inclusion should not depend solely on individual effort (Fehérvári & Varga, 2023).

Overall, the findings align with Inclusive Leadership Theory, showing that accessible systems and supportive leadership are essential for meaningful participation and organisational effectiveness.

Impact of Inclusive Leadership on Organisational Effectiveness

The findings indicate that the inclusion of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership and decision-making structures enhances organisational effectiveness in several key ways. Participants and stakeholders reported improvements in collaboration, workplace culture, innovation, and fairness in decision-making, supporting the view that inclusion is both an ethical and strategic organisational asset (Greene & Kirton, 2021).

A key benefit identified is increased diversity of perspectives. Participants noted that individuals with communication impairments often develop unique adaptive skills that contribute alternative viewpoints to organisational problem-solving. This diversity improves decision quality and supports more comprehensive organisational responses (Jackson et al., 2018).

Inclusive leadership was also found to strengthen organisational culture and employee morale. Accessible and equitable environments promoted trust, belonging, and stronger commitment among staff. Employees were more willing to participate actively when they perceived leadership as fair and inclusive.

The study further found that inclusion enhances organisational reputation and legitimacy. Organisations that prioritised disability inclusion were viewed more positively by employees and external stakeholders, improving their public image and perceived social

responsibility (Shah & Khan, 2020).

Additionally, inclusive communication practices such as visual aids, written summaries, and digital tools improved clarity and efficiency across organisations, benefiting all employees. Participation in decision-making also increased when employees felt psychologically safe to contribute ideas (Edmondson, 2018).

However, the benefits of inclusion depend on genuine implementation rather than symbolic representation. Tokenistic inclusion limits effectiveness and reduces trust in leadership structures. Despite initial costs related to accessibility, participants emphasized that long-term benefits outweigh these challenges.

Overall, the findings confirm that inclusive leadership improves organisational effectiveness through enhanced diversity, communication, employee engagement, and institutional legitimacy.

Comparative Discussion of Findings with Existing Literature

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A major benefit identified is increased diversity of perspectives. Participants explained that individuals with communication impairments often develop adaptive problem-solving skills through navigating accessibility barriers. These experiences contribute alternative viewpoints that enrich organisational decision-making and support more comprehensive solutions (Jackson et al., 2018).

Inclusive leadership was also found to improve organisational culture and employee morale. Accessible and equitable environments fostered trust, belonging, and stronger employee commitment. Employees were more willing to participate actively when they perceived leadership as fair, responsive, and inclusive.

The study further revealed that inclusion enhances organisational reputation and legitimacy. Organisations that demonstrated commitment to disability inclusion were viewed more positively by employees and external stakeholders, strengthening their public image and social responsibility (Shah & Khan, 2020).

In addition, inclusive communication practices such as visual aids, written summaries, and digital tools improved clarity, coordination, and efficiency across organisations. Psychological safety also increased employee participation in decision-making processes, as individuals felt more comfortable expressing ideas without fear of marginalisation (Edmondson, 2018).

However, the findings emphasise that these benefits depend on genuine implementation rather than symbolic inclusion.

Tokenistic practices limit effectiveness and reduce trust in leadership structures. Although accessibility measures may require initial investment, participants noted that long-term organisational benefits outweigh these costs.

Overall, the findings confirm that inclusive leadership enhances organisational effectiveness through improved diversity, communication, employee engagement, and institutional legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study examined inclusive leadership and organisational effectiveness with particular focus on the participation of persons with hearing and speech impairments in leadership and decision-making structures. The findings revealed that although contemporary organisations increasingly acknowledge the importance of diversity and inclusion, substantial barriers continue to restrict meaningful participation for individuals with communication impairments. These barriers include inaccessible communication systems, discriminatory organisational attitudes, weak implementation of inclusion policies, limited access to leadership development opportunities, and exclusion from informal organisational networks. The study further established that these challenges are largely structural and institutional rather than consequences of impairment itself, thereby reinforcing the principles of the Social Model of Disability.

The study also demonstrated that inclusive leadership practices contribute significantly to organisational effectiveness. Organisations that adopted accessible communication systems, supportive leadership approaches, inclusive workplace cultures, and equitable participation mechanisms experienced stronger collaboration, improved employee morale, enhanced innovation, and increased institutional legitimacy. The inclusion of persons with hearing and speech impairments within leadership structures introduced diverse perspectives and adaptive problem-solving approaches that strengthened organisational decision-making processes. These findings confirm that inclusive leadership is not only an ethical responsibility but also a strategic organisational advantage capable of improving institutional sustainability and performance.

Overall, the study contributes to existing scholarship by addressing the limited attention given to communication-related impairments within leadership and organisational research. It highlights the importance of moving beyond symbolic representation towards genuine participation and accessibility in organisational governance structures. The study therefore recommends that organisations strengthen disability inclusion policies, invest in accessible communication technologies, promote disability awareness

programmes, and create equitable leadership development opportunities for persons with hearing and speech impairments. Future research should further explore disability-inclusive leadership across different cultural and organisational contexts using broader comparative and longitudinal approaches in order to deepen understanding of inclusive organisational transformation.

Recommendations

1. Organisations should develop clear disability inclusion and accessibility policies that specifically address the communication needs of persons with hearing and speech impairments. These policies should include the provision of sign language interpreters, captioning systems, assistive communication technologies, and accessible meeting procedures within leadership and decision-making structures.
2. Organisations should create leadership training programmes, mentorship initiatives, and professional development opportunities specifically designed to support persons with hearing and speech impairments.
3. Organisations should conduct regular disability awareness and inclusion training for employees, managers, and organisational leaders. These programmes should challenge stereotypes associated with hearing and speech impairments and promote understanding of communication diversity within workplace environments.
4. Governments and regulatory institutions should ensure stronger enforcement of workplace disability inclusion laws and policies, particularly regarding leadership participation and accessibility standards. Incentives may also be introduced to encourage organisations to adopt inclusive governance practices and invest in accessibility technologies.

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