



POLICY BRIEF #2

# WHAT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MEANS FOR d/DEAF LEARNERS IN THE PHILIPPINES:

CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGNING A DEAF-INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATIONAL MODEL

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) puts specific emphasis on the important role that education plays in building overall adaptive capacity to climate change and its impacts. Yet, an overwhelming number of d/Deaf still face limited access to education. This was found to be associated with limited resources and limited opportunities for d/Deaf to enter formal schooling. While the Philippine government has made substantial progress in democratizing education in an effort to promote access to education for all, efforts to ensure quality of learning experience, especially for

d/Deaf learners appears to be lacking. Education for d/Deaf learners has only recently shifted to an inclusive education framework. However, the challenge lies in defining what inclusive education looks like for d/Deaf learners<sup>1</sup> as well as strategies for its effective implementation given the unique needs and requirements of this segment of the student population. The policy brief offers recommendations on important considerations when designing a Deaf-inclusive education model, primarily based on provisions of the FSL Act enacted in 2018, which called for the adoption of FSL in education for the d/Deaf.

<sup>1</sup> In this context, d/Deaf learners pertain to those students with hearing loss who use sign language and identify themselves as members of the Deaf community, as well as those with hearing loss and may not use sign language (e.g. Hard of Hearing, late deafness, etc.)

#### KEYWORDS

Inclusive education, Deaf-inclusive education, Deaf learners

# INTRODUCTION



Education forms a critical component of building the overall adaptive capacity of the d/Deaf to climate change and its impacts. It is considered as the “single most important social and economic factor” being linked to the reduction of vulnerabilities to natural disasters (Striessnig, Lutz, & Patt, 2013). Education has significant implications for a persons’ employability, their level of awareness and understanding of existing risks, and access to information on risk-reduction strategies which are all factors to adaptive capacity (Wamsler, Brink, & Rentala, 2012). Yet, access to quality education still remains a prevailing challenge within the d/Deaf community. According to the Department of Education (DepEd)’s Learning Information System (LIS), a total of 11,058 students with Hearing impairment were enrolled in S.Y. 2022-2023.

States, including the Philippines, have an obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels (see Article 24). However, the global figure that eight out of ten d/Deaf persons in the world have not received education at all<sup>2</sup> points to the fact that government measures may not be effective or adequate to overcome barriers that impede d/Deaf’s access to education. This is an important finding and should be seriously considered, noting how important education is as an agent in addressing the issue

of climate change. Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), States are given the responsibility to develop and implement educational and public awareness programs on climate change and its effects. This provision specifically places emphasis on the important role that education plays in building overall adaptive capacity to climate change and its impacts.

Limited access to education for the d/Deaf has been associated with multiple drivers, including low financial resources of the family to support education and very limited opportunities for the d/Deaf to enter formal schooling. In the Philippines, there is still a limited number of academic institutions that are able to cater to the d/Deaf as of today. It is even more concerning that d/Deaf learners who are able to enter formal schooling still face added barriers, including limited capacity of schools to provide Deaf-accessible learning materials or to teach using sign language, either through hiring of sign language interpreters or teachers capable of teaching using Filipino Sign Language (FSL). These existing issues and barriers point to the fact that, until now, we have yet to realize a Deaf-appropriate model of education in the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> World Federation of the Deaf, n.d.



## PHILIPPINE POLICIES ON DEAF EDUCATION

The Deaf's right to access to quality education is well enshrined in several Philippine laws. **R.A. 7277 ("Magna Carta for Disabled Persons")** provides that the State shall ensure that persons with disabilities are provided with access to quality education and ample opportunities to develop their skills. It further stipulates that the special requirements of persons with disabilities must be considered in the formulation of policies and programs for their education. Learning institutions are encouraged to provide auxiliary services, such as qualified interpreters or other effective methods of delivering materials specifically for Deaf learners. The same law provides that persons with disabilities are entitled to educational assistance in both public and private schools.

Existing laws, such as **R.A. 10410 ("Early Years Act of 2013")** and **R.A. 10533 ("Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013")**, have formally recognized the use of FSL as visual language of the Deaf. With the enactment of **R.A. 11106 ("Filipino Sign Language Act of 2018")**, which legally recognizes FSL as official national language of the Filipino Deaf community, the DepEd, Commission on

Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and all other relevant government offices involved in the education for the d/Deaf, are directed to use FSL as the official medium of instruction in education for the d/Deaf. The IRR of the said law provides additional guidance on the needs and requirements of d/Deaf learners. However, integration of FSL into the formal education for the Deaf has proven to be challenging, given the limited number of signing teachers and FSL interpreters in the country, particularly in schools in rural and far flung areas. The current ratio of FSL interpreters to Deaf individuals in the Philippines is estimated to be at 1:1000.

In 2022, **R.A. 11650 ("Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act")** was enacted into law. The law adopts the social model of disability, recognizing the right of all citizens, including learners with disabilities, to an inclusive, equitable, and quality education, and the need to make education accessible to all for the attainment of this right. As of this writing, the DepEd has yet to release the IRR of the law. The Department has been conducting consultations and is targeting release of the final draft of the IRR within 2023. The purpose of this policy brief is to offer perspectives on the current state-of-play of Deaf education in the Philippines as well as to proffer recommendations for consideration in the crafting of IRR of the said law, specifically in relation to education of the Deaf.



## INTEGRATION IS NOT INCLUSION:

GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN DEAF EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES



The current practice in the Philippines is that Deaf learners are often enrolled in the Special Education (SPED) Program, especially in public schools, where there is no tuition fee required for all learners with special needs or disabilities. The SPED program is the Department of Education (DepEd)'s program for learners with special needs, a category under which they also consider persons with disabilities, including the d/Deaf, to belong. In this type of program, students are supposedly provided with adequate and appropriate support and accommodations that would cater to their special educational needs and requirements in an effort to increase access to quality and inclusive education for all. There is also an option for schools to create a separate class for a specific type of disability or special need, such as those with hearing impairment. Ideally, every school division across the country operates a SPED center.

As of 2017, there are a total of 648 SPED Centers and regular schools offering SPED programs nationwide (Lacson, 2017). An alternative route of enrollment for Deaf learners is to be placed in regular classes, wherein they are mixed with learners without disabilities. Eligibility to enroll in such classes would usually depend on the severity and nature of one's disability as well as the academic readiness of the student to attend regular classes<sup>2</sup>.

During consultations, however, teachers with experience in teaching Deaf students pointed out that the current educational model for Deaf learners has not been effective primarily because of the limited number of signing teachers or FSL interpreters able to provide assistance to the Hearing teachers in classrooms where there are

Deaf students (also see Dela Fuente, 2021). In some classrooms, Deaf students are mixed with hearing students with no signing teachers or sign language interpreters at all. On rare occasions when there are sign language interpreters in some localities, there are only a handful of available sign language interpreters able to provide assistance to d/Deaf students. Due to the current lack of accreditation system for FSL interpretation, the quality of interpretation in schools is also a factor to the quality of learning of d/Deaf learners.

In summary, the current state-of-play of d/Deaf education in the Philippines shows that the adoption of FSL in education for the d/Deaf is still a challenge. There is still a very limited number of sign language interpreters across the country. The number of interpreters deployed specifically in schools, especially in rural and far flung areas, is much lower. Apart from that, hiring of FSL interpretation services has been a significant budgetary consideration for schools, especially for those dealing with limited budgets to even hire FSL interpreters. FSL interpretation costs approximately 1,020.41 pesos per hour (as of 2023). For an hour-long session, it is common practice to have at least two interpreters present to prevent fatigue. Assuming that there are eight (8) one-hour long subjects a day and there is a need to hire at least two FSL interpreters, it is typically the Deaf students for whom schools need to spend an estimated 16,326.56 pesos for a single day only, adding a major barrier to mainstreaming the Deaf into formal education. There is also a need to consider the quality of sign language interpretation, as this is a factor to the quality of learning for d/Deaf learners. Currently, there are no standards for FSL interpretation. Local government units (LGUs) have also admitted the need to build capacity for teachers to learn FSL, citing that the law requiring the use of FSL in education for the d/Deaf was only enacted in 2018. There is also a lack of publicly available reference materials pointing to any existing or ongoing production of accessible instructional materials for d/Deaf learners, despite annual allocations in the national budget for instructional materials for d/Deaf and other learners with disabilities. Under the General Appropriations Act for F.Y. 2023, textbooks and other instructional materials for learners with disabilities who are enrolled in the formal school system and Alternative

Learning System (ALS) have been given an appropriation of 100 million pesos.

Without actual measures to make learning in schools more Deaf-accessible, the current model of education for d/Deaf learners in the Philippines inevitably places the burden of effective learning on d/Deaf students who are forced to adapt to the Hearing way of learning, with learning materials and methods of teaching maladaptive to their unique needs and requirements. Technical knowledge and concepts like climate change are even more challenging for the Deaf to learn in school. Deaf stakeholders cited that very few FSL signs on climate terminologies are being used in schools as a reason that this topic is not taught in schools as much as Math and English. While studies on effectiveness of Deaf education in the Philippines remain scarce, international literature suggests that Deaf and Hard-of-hearing students generally face greater difficulties in schools, as they find it harder to follow teachers' instructions as compared to their Hearing counterparts (see Tsach & Most, 2016 as cited by Paatsch & Toe, 2020). Language deprivation, in fact, has also been identified as a factor to cognitive delays and mental health issues in Deaf children (Hall, 2018).

The current education model for Deaf learners in the Philippines is fundamentally inconsistent with the principle of inclusion and a step backwards in the country's progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The model is merely a way of "mainstreaming" Deaf learners into the traditional educational system, without necessarily transforming the education system to adapt to their needs and requirements, which inclusive education specifically advocates for.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SPED-FREQUENTLY-ASKED-QUESTIONS.pdf>

## PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE GREATER DEAF-INCLUSION IN EDUCATION



### CREATE AND REGULARLY UPDATE DISAGGREGATED DATABASE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

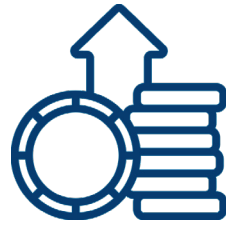
Under R.A. 11650, the DepEd is tasked to maintain and regularly update a Learning Information System (LIS) that shall store disaggregated data of learners with disabilities. Keeping accurate data on the student population with special educational needs and requirements is important to monitor effectiveness of existing educational programs, and identify any areas for further improvement as well as where additional educational support is still needed. The challenge to maintaining such a database is the need for internet and equipment for the DepEd or LGUs to conduct data collection and reporting as well as the methodology of data collection (e.g., how persons with disabilities are defined). There is also a need to reconcile data from this database with the Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities that is being maintained by the Department of Health to avoid duplication of efforts in data gathering.



### STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FSL ACT, SPECIFICALLY ON THE ADOPTION OF FSL IN DEAF EDUCATION

Linguistic accessibility or the use of FSL to access information is critical to ensure the successful academic performance and achievement of social potential of d/Deaf learners. Government institutions, including DepEd, CHED and TESDA, should hasten their efforts to fully and effectively integrate the use of FSL in the education of d/Deaf at all levels. In the IRR of the FSL Act, these institutions are directed to issue an inclusive Agency Information and Communication Policy to adopt FSL as the medium of instruction for Deaf learners and specify the needed sign language competency for their respective Agencies based on the minimum standards set by the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF). However, there is no publicly available data pointing to progress made by these agencies in crafting said policies.

Similarly, in the government's efforts to integrate climate education into the formal education system, schools must fully utilize FSL signs for climate and DRRM terminologies to teach d/Deaf students. Empowering the d/Deaf to become agents of change, capable of contributing to climate action, always starts with education. While there are existing laws reinforcing the integration of climate education into the formal education system, such as R.A. 9729 ("Climate Change Act of 2009") and R.A. 9512 ("National Environment Awareness and Education Act"), there is no data available regarding the implementation of these policies; and more so, how effective these have been in educating d/Deaf learners about climate change and its impacts.



## SECURE INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF LEARNING MATERIALS SPECIFICALLY FOR DEAF LEARNERS

In the national budget, the annual appropriation for instructional materials is broadly for all learners with disabilities, where Deaf students are lumped together with other learners with disabilities. There is, consequently, inadequate recognition given to the different educational needs and requirements of the Deaf noting that they have inherently unique communication needs. For example, it is ideal to have a featured FSL interpreter and embedded English closed captions in video materials for d/Deaf learners. Thus far, R.A. 11650 has only provided that the DepEd shall be granted an authority to transcribe adopted instructional materials in an accessible format. Under the FSL Act, the DepEd is being tasked to develop guidelines for the selection, production, procurement and distribution of print and video materials in FSL to all public schools, day care centers, and national child development centers.



## DEVELOP AN ACCREDITATION SYSTEM FOR FSL INTERPRETATION

Section 5 of the FSL Act provides policy guidance on standardization of FSL interpretation, wherein KWF is tasked to establish a national system of standards, accreditations, and procedures for FSL interpreting. Currently, this is an ongoing project of the KWF. This system shall include policies on the practice of interpreting as a profession, such as compensation rates and benefits, working conditions, procedures for grievances and others. An accreditation system for FSL interpreters can help ensure that quality of interpretation is delivered in schools.



## HIRE MORE DEAF TEACHERS

Notwithstanding the current challenges in hiring FSL interpreters and FSL-fluent teachers and high budgetary requirements of hiring FSL interpreters, it would be more sustainable over the long run for DepEd and schools to hire Deaf teachers. R.A. 10524 has provided that at least 1% of all positions in all government agencies, offices or corporations shall be reserved for persons with disability. This also covers public school teachers. In its position paper on the language rights of the Deaf, the World Federation of the Deaf (n.d.) underlined that a school environment which allows access to sign language is a crucial factor for d/Deaf students to acquire a strong sense of linguistic and cultural identity. Under FSL Act, the Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC) is being tasked to issue an Agency Information and Communication Policy that shall include review of policies and practices on licensing of teachers, and provide alternative assessment procedures for Deaf teacher education graduates. Hiring Deaf teachers would also be more ideal. According to an international study, educational interpretation may not be enough to make education more inclusive for d/Deaf learners. Educational interpreters may frequently omit and alter large parts of messages, causing significant differences in the message delivery (Langer & Crume, 2023).

Table 1. Summary of recommendations towards achieving greater Deaf-inclusion in education

RECOMMENDATION	RELEVANT POLICIES
Create and regularly update disaggregated database of students with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Republic Act No. 11650 ("Inclusive Education Act of 2022")</li> </ul>
Strengthen implementation of the adoption of FSL in d/Deaf education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Republic Act No. 11106 ("Filipino Sign Language Act of 2018")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 7277 ("Magna Carta for Disabled Persons")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 10410 ("Early Years Act of 2013")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 10533 ("Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 9729 ("Climate Change Act of 2009")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 9512 ("National Environment Awareness and Education Act")</li> </ul>
Secure institutional funding for development and production of learning materials specifically for d/Deaf learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Republic Act No. 11650 ("Inclusive Education Act of 2022")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 11106 ("Filipino Sign Language Act of 2018")</li> </ul>
Develop an accreditation system for FSL interpretation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Republic Act No. 11106 ("Filipino Sign Language Act of 2018")</li> </ul>
Hire more Deaf teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Republic Act No. 11106 ("Filipino Sign Language Act of 2018")</li> <li>Republic Act No. 10524 ("An Act Expanding the Positions Reserved for Persons with Disability, Amending for the Purpose the Republic Act No. 7277, as Amended, Otherwise Known as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability")</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION



It is only very recently that education for the d/Deaf in the Philippines has shifted to an inclusive education framework, which gained more traction following the enactment of the Inclusive Education Act in 2022. In the case of d/Deaf education, however, the challenge lies in defining what inclusive education looks like for d/Deaf learners and strategies for its effective implementation, given the unique needs and requirements of this segment of the student population. Ultimately, future discussions must revolve around the question of whether integrating the d/Deaf into the existing model of education for the Hearing or developing an entirely new model of education is more accessible and appropriate for the d/Deaf. The Philippine government's efforts to enhance inclusion in education have largely focused on democratizing education for learners with special needs or disabilities by granting free education, or

discounted tuition fees in private schools, and other means of educational support. However, the quality of classroom experience for learners with disabilities, especially for d/Deaf learners, seems questionable. Teachers have pointed out that the current model of education for d/Deaf learners is not entirely effective and inclusive. This could be further improved by the adoption of FSL in Deaf education and the development of Deaf-accessible learning materials, among others. Other programmatic measures include having a disaggregated database of students with disabilities, which can inform evidence-based reforms and strategies to improve the education of d/Deaf students, as well as developing an accreditation system for FSL interpretation to ensure quality interpretation is delivered in schools.

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