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Labor Force Productivity: A Comparative Analysis of The Deaf and Hearing Person.

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Abstract: This study explores labor force productivity through a comparative qualitative analysis of Deaf and hearing employees, examining how communication, inclusion, and organizational support influence workplace performance. Anchored on the Social Model of Disability, Human Capital Theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the study emphasizes that productivity differences are largely shaped by social and structural factors rather than by hearing ability itself. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were gathered from 10 Deaf employees, 5 hearing employees, 4 employers, and 1 hearing supervisor through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and workplace observations. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of experience and meaning. Findings revealed five key themes: communication accessibility, workplace adaptation and support, perceptions and stereotypes, motivation and work commitment, and technology and inclusion. Deaf employees demonstrated strong commitment, attention to detail, and resilience when communication barriers were minimized through interpreters and assistive devices. However, where such support was lacking, productivity suffered due to exclusion and miscommunication. Employers' attitudes were found to significantly influence the morale and efficiency of Deaf workers, underscoring the importance of inclusive leadership and organizational culture. The study concludes that productivity is a function of accessibility, equity, and inclusive practices rather than disability status. It recommends the promotion of communication accessibility, inclusive workplace policies, investment in adaptive technologies, and policy-driven research on Deaf employment. These measures can enhance equal participation, harness the full potential of Deaf individuals, and foster a more inclusive and productive workforce.

Keywords: Labor force productivity, Deaf employees, Hearing employees, Communication accessibility, Workplace inclusion.

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Introduction

Labour force productivity is a key indication of a nation's economic success, showing how well human resources contribute to growth and development (Bykova et al., 2024). It quantifies production per unit of worker input, indicating national competitiveness, industrial performance, and organisational success. High labour productivity accelerates development and raises living standards, while low productivity indicates inefficiency and underutilisation of human potential. Understanding workforce productivity aspects like social inclusion and diversity is crucial for sustainable economic growth. Modern economies recognise workforce inclusion and diversity as drivers of innovation, creativity, and sustainable growth (Delaware, Verma, 2024). Problem-solving and organisational development benefit from a varied workforce of differing genders, talents, and backgrounds. Inclusive employment strategies promote social equality and production by utilising all human potential. Diversity boosts team performance and innovation, demonstrating the economic and societal benefits of integrating excluded groups like people with disabilities into mainstream employment. Deaf people are distinct but sometimes marginalised in the workforce (Sommer Lindsay et al., 2023). Despite their ability and skills, Deaf people often face communication issues, inadequate training, and discrimination that limit their participation. Due to social misconceptions about their talents, Deaf people are underrepresented in formal employment in many developing countries, including Nigeria (ADENIYI, 2021). However, studies and activism show that with sign language interpretation, assistive technology, and inclusive employment practices, the Deaf may match or exceed hearing people in productivity and commitment. Deaf people are still seen as less capable and productive than hearing people, despite the global disability inclusion movement (Leigh et al., 2022). These misconceptions stem from communication gaps and a lack of awareness of Deaf abilities and adaptability. Many businesses believe Deaf people need extensive supervision or cannot operate in teams, resulting in discriminatory hiring and limited professional progress. Such misconceptions lower Deaf employees' self-esteem and deprive firms of skilled and motivated personnel who could boost productivity and innovation. Many studies have investigated labour productivity, but few have compared Deaf and hearing workers. Deaf employees have not been studied in organisational productivity evaluations; therefore, little is known about how disability and communication accessibility affect working outcomes. Consequently, policy

and management methods often ignore Deaf workers' specific requirements and skills. This neglect fosters systemic exclusion and occupational inequalities, underscoring the need for qualitative, experiential study on Deaf-hearing productivity relations (Lee, 2025).

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and compare the productivity of Deaf and hearing persons in the labour force, with attention to their lived experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies within different occupational settings. It seeks to uncover how communication accessibility, workplace inclusion, and organisational support influence productivity outcomes among both groups. The research also aims to challenge prevailing stereotypes by providing evidence-based insights into the real determinants of productivity across the Deaf and hearing workforce. To achieve these goals, the study will address the following research questions: What factors influence the productivity of Deaf and hearing workers in selected organisations? How do communication patterns and accessibility affect the productivity of Deaf employees? In what ways do employers' perceptions and attitudes impact the productivity of Deaf and hearing workers? What adaptive strategies do Deaf workers employ to enhance their productivity in inclusive or non-inclusive workplaces?

This study adds to disability inclusion discourse by highlighting that productivity should be assessed by talent, motivation, and opportunity, not physical or auditory ability. It uncovers how Deaf people work and challenges prejudices that have hindered their employment opportunities. This research promotes social justice and Deaf workforce inclusion by conceptualising production inclusively.

This study will inform policy and workplace practices that promote equality and productivity for all employees with evidence-based findings. Policymakers can use the findings to improve disability employment frameworks, while employers can learn inclusive workplace strategies. The research may also help advocacy groups improve Deaf worker access, awareness, and empowerment in the workplace.

The study examines Deaf and hearing workers in manufacturing, education, and services. These sectors were selected to compare productivity patterns across different work contexts. Employee experiences, corporate rules, and interpersonal relationships that affect productivity will be emphasised.

The qualitative study seeks a comprehensive, contextualised understanding of Deaf and hearing productivity experiences rather than statistical generalisation. Interviews, observations, and thematic analysis enable rich workplace narratives and insights. The

sample size and context may limit the findings; therefore, conclusions should not be generalised to other work contexts or populations.

Literature

Labour force productivity is the efficiency with which workers turn time, skills, and effort into valued outputs in an economic system (Appelbaum, 2023; Saha, 2024; Salimova et al., 2021). It is usually calculated as the ratio of production (goods or services) to labour input (hours or personnel). Skills, technology, motivation, and organisational support boost labour productivity, allowing workers to accomplish more in less time. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 1999) states that education, work environment, innovation, and inclusive policies that allow everyone to contribute affect labour productivity. In this study, labour force productivity includes qualitative factors like job satisfaction, communication flow, and organisational inclusion that affect Deaf and hearing workers (Canton, 2021). Deafness in the workplace is a hearing impairment that impairs sound perception and spoken language. Deafness is a minor to severe loss of hearing; according to Leach (2025), it can affect workplace communication, safety, and socialisation. Environment and attitude frequently cause these issues, not disability. Sign language interpretation, written communication tools, and inclusive management strategies can help Deaf employees function as well as hearing ones. Thus, comprehending deafness in the workplace entails seeing it as a unique human experience that deserves accommodation and inclusion rather than pity or rejection. Communication difficulties are Deaf employees' biggest challenge to inclusion and productivity. Sign language, visual alerts, captioning, and inclusive staff training are needed to include Deaf workers (Leach, 2025).

According to Forsberg (2024), communication accessibility improves job performance and gives Deaf workers a sense of belonging and equality. When businesses lack accessible communication, misconceptions and isolation can lower efficiency and morale. In contrast, inclusive communication improves teamwork, productivity, and culture. Thus, Deaf workplace inclusion should be seen as a strategic investment in human capital rather than a social obligation (Forsberg, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The Social Model of Disability, developed by Michael Oliver in 1983, contends that social constraints that limit participation and access cause disability, not physical or sensory impairment. This concept challenges the individualistic medical model. Instead, the social model highlights that prejudice, inaccessible communication, and exclusionary attitudes

hinder people. To build an inclusive and fair environment, physical, social, and attitudinal barriers must be removed (Robertson & Jaswal, 2024). This theory views deafness as a social construct driven by discriminatory workplace practices, making it relevant to current research. The Social Model of Disability shows how workplace impediments like a lack of interpreters, inadequate technology, and negative employer attitudes affect Deaf and hearing workers' productivity. By using this methodology, the study changes focus from Deaf people's constraints to the corporate environment that promotes or hinders production.

Proposed by Gary S. Becker in 1964, the Human Capital Theory posits that individuals' education, skills, experience, and health are forms of capital that enhance productivity and economic value. This idea posits that investing in human capital via training, education, and development enhances worker efficiency and total organisational productivity. Consequently, productivity is contingent upon the efficacy with which firms cultivate and leverage their people resources (Teng et al., 2022). Becker's theory has been extensively employed to elucidate disparities in performance among employees and industries, contingent upon access to skill development opportunities and education. This research employs Human Capital Theory to elucidate how the development and application of Deaf persons' skills might augment overall worker production. It underscores that Deaf employees, when provided with equitable access to training, education, and communication resources, may perform as successfully as their hearing counterparts. The approach emphasises the significance of enhancing Deaf employees' capabilities through inclusive human resource practices and adaptive technologies that improve their competence and productivity.

A theory developed by John Stacey Adams in 1963, Equity Theory focuses on fairness in the workplace as a determinant of employee motivation and productivity. The idea posits that individuals evaluate fairness by juxtaposing their inputs (effort, skill, experience) and outcomes (compensation, recognition, promotion) against those of others. Employees who see equity are generally more motivated and productive, but perceptions of inequity may result in unhappiness and diminished performance (Uka & Prendi, 2021). Equity Theory emphasizes the psychological aspects of workplace productivity associated with justice, inclusion, and acknowledgment. This study utilises Equity Theory to analyse the impact of perceived justice on the motivation and productivity of Deaf employees in comparison to their hearing counterparts. Deaf employees who perceive inequitable treatment, exclusion from communication, or restricted career possibilities may encounter

diminished morale and productivity. Conversely, when firms guarantee equitable treatment by inclusive communication, impartial appraisal, and access to opportunities, Deaf employees exhibit dedication and exceptional performance (Huyck et al., 2021). Consequently, this hypothesis underscores the significance of workplace fairness as a driver of increased productivity among various employee demographics.

Dong et al. (2023) analysed productivity levels of employees with and without disabilities in firms. The researchers discovered that when given appropriate accommodations and inclusive policies, employees with disabilities, including Deaf individuals, performed at the same level as or surpassed the productivity of their hearing peers (Dong et al., 2023). The research indicated that inclusive organisations exhibited elevated morale and reduced turnover rates. It underscored that disability does not forecast diminished output; rather, environmental obstacles frequently influence performance results. Notwithstanding its significant contributions, the study predominantly depended on quantitative data obtained from self-reported surveys, which may inadequately reflect the lived experiences and emotional aspects of Deaf workers. The study's emphasis on large firms restricts its relevance to developing nations such as Nigeria, where workplace inclusion and access to assistive technologies are less developed.

This study tackles the gap by utilising a qualitative approach to examine the personal experiences and contextual factors affecting productivity among Deaf and hearing workers in Nigeria. It offers an enhanced comprehension of how social, cultural, and organisational settings influence the productivity of Deaf individuals in specific local situations.

A study by Chelius et al. (2022) examined obstacles to work for Deaf individuals in South Africa. The researchers discovered that limited communication access, employer discrimination, and a lack of sign language interpreters were important challenges inhibiting Deaf persons from gaining and sustaining employment. The research highlighted the impact of attitudinal and institutional discrimination in sustaining unemployment and underemployment within the Deaf community. While the study clearly identified employment impediments, it did not go extensively into how such restrictions hinder the productivity of Deaf people already in the labour force. The emphasis was predominantly on employment entry rather than on workplace experiences and productivity comparisons between Deaf and hearing employees (Chelius et al., 2022).

The current study expands on Omar and Ngui (2024) and investigates how communication hurdles and prejudice affect both employment access and workplace productivity. It examines comparative experiences between Deaf and hearing employees, thus offering a more thorough understanding of workforce inclusion and its effects on productivity.

According to a study by Lee and Tsai (2021), the implementation of adaptive technologies, including captioning, video relay services, and text-based communication tools, markedly improves the performance and integration of Deaf employees in the workplace. The research indicated that firms investing in assistive technologies have enhanced team collaboration, increased job satisfaction, and elevated productivity among Deaf personnel. The results indicate that technology acts as a conduit between communication deficiencies and productivity results.

The study presents persuasive proof regarding the advantages of adaptable technology, although it primarily concentrates on technologically advanced nations with strong accessibility frameworks. It disregards socio-economic constraints in underdeveloped countries where technical resources may be limited or prohibitively expensive for both companies and Deaf personnel.

This study aims to investigate the impact of adaptive technologies in a developing context such as Nigeria, where resource constraints and cultural perceptions may influence accessibility and efficacy. The objective is to comprehend how Deaf employees adjust and maintain productivity in low-technology settings, thus expanding the concept of inclusion beyond technological solutions.

Despite increasing global interest in workplace diversity, there is a significant deficiency in comparative qualitative research examining the lived experiences of Deaf and hearing employees, particularly in developing nations (Fullman, 2023). The majority of current research is quantitative, concentrating only on accessibility or discrimination, while overlooking the more profound emotional and experiential aspects of productivity. This study addresses the gap by offering a comprehensive qualitative comparison of how Deaf and hearing individuals perceive and experience productivity in their employment. It fosters a nuanced comprehension of inclusion, motivation, and performance based on actual experiences rather than theoretical statistics.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative comparative research methodology utilising a phenomenological approach to comprehend and interpret the lived experiences of Deaf and hearing individuals in their workplace settings. The selection of a phenomenological design was driven by the necessity to investigate participants' subjective reality, emotions, and perceptions of productivity as influenced by their communication experiences and workplace interactions. The study's population comprised Deaf and hearing personnel from chosen firms in the manufacturing, education, and service sectors in Anambra and Enugu States, Nigeria. Participants were meticulously chosen by purposive sampling to guarantee variety in age, gender, job experience, and organisational role. The study featured 20 participants: 10 Deaf employees, 5 hearing employees, 4 employers, and 1 hearing supervisor, who engaged in focus group discussions to offer management insights on productivity and inclusiveness. The selection guaranteed representation from both inclusive and non-inclusive workplaces to facilitate a comprehensive comparative analysis. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation of workplace behaviours and interactions. Interviews were performed in both spoken English and Nigerian Sign Language (NSL) with the aid of qualified interpreters to guarantee precise and effective communication with Deaf participants. The discussions and interviews were captured in audio and video formats, transcribed, and coded for analysis. Thematic analysis was utilised to discern repeating patterns and themes, adhering to Naeem et al. (2023) six-step framework: familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Ethical norms were meticulously upheld during the research process. Participants granted informed consent, were guaranteed confidentiality, and could withdraw at any point without repercussions. Respect for the communication choices of Deaf participants was emphasised, ensuring fair engagement and authenticity in their responses.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Summary of Respondents

Category of Respondents	Number	Gender (M/F)	Sector/Organization Type	Mode of Data Collection	Communication Mode Used	Remarks
Deaf Employees	10	6M / 4F	Manufacturing, Education, Services	Semi-structured Interviews	Nigerian Sign Language (NSL) /	Expressed high motivation;

				& Observation	Written English	faced communication challenges
Hearing Employees	5	3M / 2F	Manufacturing, Education, Services	Semi-structured Interviews	Spoken English	Reported good collaboration, but limited understanding of Deaf colleagues
Employers (Managers)	4	3M / 1F	Manufacturing, Service, Education	Focus Group Discussions	Spoken English	Highlighted productivity but noted the cost of inclusion measures
Hearing Supervisor	1	1M	Manufacturing	Semi-structured Interview & Observation	Spoken English / Gestures	Served as a mediator between Deaf and hearing workers

Total Respondents: 20

Emerging Themes

1. Communication and Productivity: Influence of Communication Accessibility on Performance

Communication appeared as the most significant factor influencing workplace productivity for both Deaf and hearing personnel. Deaf participants indicated that restricted access to interpreters and insufficient communication tools frequently hindered workflow, postponed feedback, and led to misconceptions during task performance. Conversely, when communication tools such as written instructions, sign interpreters, and visual alerts were accessible, Deaf workers executed tasks with efficiency and often surpassed expectations in activities necessitating concentration and accuracy. Employees recognised that communication failures with Deaf coworkers frequently hindered teamwork; yet, they appreciated the focus and dedication exhibited when duties were articulated effectively. Consequently, communication accessibility directly impacted productivity results and workplace cohesion.

2. Workplace Adaptation and Support: Organisational Efforts to Support Deaf Workers

The research indicated that organisational adaptability significantly influenced the performance of Deaf personnel. Two of the firms examined had intentionally implemented

measures to assist Deaf employees by offering sign language interpreters during meetings, visible safety signage, and adaptable work schedules. Deaf participants in these environments reported contentment and enhanced production levels. In contrast, participants in non-adaptive workplaces reported feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction stemming from inadequate support structures. Employers acknowledged that although they recognised the capabilities of Deaf workers, budgetary and policy limitations obstructed sustained assistance initiatives. The results highlight that productivity disparities are not intrinsic to Deafness but stem from insufficient institutional accommodation.

3. Perceptions and Stereotypes: Employers' and Colleagues' Attitudes

The beliefs of employers and coworkers considerably influenced the productivity experiences of Deaf workers. Some employers saw Deaf employees as industrious and dependable, while others maintained doubts over their capacity to manage intricate or leadership responsibilities. Colleagues frequently undervalued the abilities of Deaf coworkers due to communication obstacles rather than performance indicators. Deaf participants recounted experiences of being excluded from discussions or decision-making processes, which adversely impacted their morale. In organisations that fostered an inclusive culture and implemented sensitivity training, both groups indicated enhanced cooperation and mutual regard. This subject highlights that attitudinal impediments, rather than Deafness itself, impede optimal productivity.

4. Motivation and Work Commitment: Comparative Insights between Deaf and Hearing Workers

Both Deaf and hearing employees exhibited substantial motivation for their work; however, their sources of motivation varied. Deaf individuals identified acknowledgement, equitable treatment, and the aspiration to demonstrate competence as primary motivators. Numerous Deaf employees exhibited exceptional commitment and punctuality, perceiving their occupations as pathways to self-esteem and autonomy. Conversely, hearing employees associated their motivation with opportunities for promotion, wage increases, and acknowledgement from management. Supervisors noted that Deaf employees frequently demonstrated enhanced resilience and concentration, particularly in task-oriented positions, whereas hearing employees generally excelled in communication-focused roles. These disparities underscore the significance of psychological empowerment and inclusion in influencing work commitment among both groups.

5. Technology and Inclusion: Role of Assistive Devices in Bridging Productivity Gaps

The implementation of assistive technologies, including visual alarms, captioned video calls, and text-based communication applications, markedly enhanced workplace inclusion and productivity for Deaf employees. Deaf employees with access to these tools reported enhanced interactions, less reliance on interpreters, and heightened job satisfaction. Nonetheless, numerous workplaces were deficient in adequate technical resources, especially in manufacturing environments where elevated noise levels and effective safety communication were essential. Employers identified cost and insufficient technical competence as obstacles to the adoption of inclusive technologies. The results indicate that the use of cost-effective assistive devices can close productivity disparities and improve overall efficiency in the workforce.

Interpretation of Findings

Integration of the Social Model of Disability with Human Capital Theory

The results are in excellent agreement with the Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1983), which posits that environmental and social barriers, rather than impairments, hinder persons' involvement. The productivity obstacles encountered by Deaf employees primarily arise from insufficient communication methods and attitudinal biases, rather than their hearing impairment. Likewise, the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) is pertinent, highlighting that when Deaf employees are afforded equitable access to training, communication assistance, and technology, their productivity aligns with or surpasses that of hearing employees. Investment in inclusive practices directly results in enhanced organisational performance and the optimisation of human resources.

Analysis of Comparable and Divergent Factors Influencing Productivity

Both Deaf and hearing employees regarded clear communication, helpful management, and acknowledgment as essential factors for enhancing production. Deaf employees encountered further obstacles owing to the absence of interpreters and assistive technologies. Notwithstanding this, their dedication, discipline, and flexibility frequently mitigated systemic deficiencies. Hearing employees benefited from a smooth communication flow but exhibited less awareness of the inclusion hurdles encountered by their Deaf colleagues. The study revealed that inclusive workplaces, which provide communication aids and sign language assistance, had more equitable productivity levels among both groups, indicating that equitable support diminishes productivity gaps. Systemic obstacles, including ineffective policy execution, insufficient financing for workplace modifications, and a lack of understanding regarding Deaf inclusion, persistently

impact productivity results. Attitudinal hurdles, such as stereotypes portraying Deaf workers as sluggish or reliant, further marginalise them within the workforce. This study's results indicate that Deaf employees have significant potential for achievement when provided with equal opportunity. An advancement in inclusive communication policies, training, and investment in assistive technology is crucial for eliminating these obstacles. By tackling these systemic and attitudinal barriers, firms can realise the complete productivity potential of both Deaf and hearing employees, fostering a more inclusive and economically vibrant workforce.

Conclusion

This study aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of labour force productivity between Deaf and hearing individuals by qualitatively exploring their experiences, problems, and strengths in the workplace. The results indicate that productivity in Deaf and hearing employees is not intrinsically influenced by hearing capacity, but is instead shaped by environmental, attitudinal, and institutional factors that affect the work experience. Communication accessibility has become a pivotal factor in productivity, affecting task execution, comprehension of instructions, and the facilitation of collaboration. Deaf employees exhibited that with suitable communication assistance, such as interpreters, written communication, or assistive equipment, they could perform on par with, and occasionally beyond, their hearing colleagues in efficiency, attention to detail, and work commitment. Consequently, the study emphasises the necessity of perceiving Deafness not as a constraint but as a condition that necessitates structural adaptation.

The study emphasised that inclusive organisational strategies significantly enhance individual and group productivity. Deaf workers reported enhanced job satisfaction, increased motivation, and superior performance when employers offered sign language interpretation, visual aids, and adaptable communication technologies. Conversely, in environments devoid of such accommodations, Deaf employees encountered frustration, loneliness, and diminished productivity, frequently attributable to systematic neglect rather than individual inadequacy. Employers' attitudes and views were crucial: affirmative and supportive management promoted collaboration and productivity, whereas prejudiced or uninformed attitudes diminished morale and impaired team cohesion. The comparative analysis of motivation among Deaf and hearing workers indicated that, although both groups exhibited commitment, Deaf employees were especially motivated by aspirations for equality, acknowledgment, and inclusion.

This research concludes that productivity is a social construct influenced by workplace inclusion, communication accessibility, and equitable chances, rather than by physical or sensory distinctions. The research, informed by the Social Model of Disability and Human Capital Theory, emphasises the necessity for a paradigm shift from perceiving Deaf employees as disabled to recognising them as competent contributors to the national workforce. By confronting institutional and attitudinal obstacles, firms can harness the untapped potential of Deaf individuals, fostering an inclusive and dynamic workforce that embodies genuine productivity and human diversity.

Recommendations

1. Organisations ought to establish communication-friendly environments for Deaf employees by hiring sign language interpreters, implementing textual or visual communication systems, and promoting staff acquisition of basic sign language skills. These measures boost task performance and accuracy while also fostering teamwork and mutual respect. The government and commercial sector should join in funding workplace interpreter programmes to provide regular accessibility for Deaf employees.

2. Employers ought to implement disability-inclusive policies that guarantee equitable recruiting, advancement, and performance assessment for Deaf employees. Ongoing sensitivity and awareness training must be implemented for both management and staff to eradicate stereotypes and misconceptions regarding Deaf employees. Inclusive policy frameworks should be incorporated into human resource management techniques to promote equity, mitigate discrimination, and establish a more equitable production environment.

3. Workplaces ought to prioritise the use of cost-effective assistive technologies, including captioned video conferencing tools, visual alarms, text-based communication software, and hearing support devices. These devices facilitate communication and improve efficiency by allowing Deaf workers to obtain information instantaneously. Employers and policymakers should acknowledge that technology inclusion is not a cost but a strategic investment that improves efficiency and fosters creativity.

4. Government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions ought to endorse ongoing studies on Deaf employment to produce data-driven insights for policy formulation

and strategic planning. National labour legislation must have explicit directives about Deaf inclusion, criteria for workplace accessibility, and systems for oversight.

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