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Advocating for
an inclusive
Education
policy system for
hard of hearing
Learners
in Uganda



HANDBOOK:

**SUPPORTING HARD-OF-HEARING
LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS**

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Part 1: Introduction

According to the National Population and Housing Census report (2024), the population of Persons with Disabilities is 13.6% of the total Population of Uganda. The disaggregated data for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (the two categories that constitute hearing impairment) showed that 41,431 persons were deaf and 273,167 persons were identified as hard of hearing. Although the number of HOH people in the school-going age was not categorically mentioned, it is certainly a significant segment of the Ugandan population that requires targeted interventions.

Schedule 3 of the Persons with Disabilities Act (2020) specifies Hard-Of-Hearing as a subcategory of hearing impairment. However, Hard-Of-hearing persons (the focus of this handbook) continue to be marginalized in terms of access to essential social services such as education, health, public infrastructure and other community services. In the education sector specifically, lack of awareness and understanding of the special needs of Hard-Of-Hearing learners has led to confusion in policy recommendations, planning and budgeting; hence greatly affecting their access to education.

Uganda Federation of Hard-Of-Hearing (UFHOH) has conducted a series of research undertakings on the existing gaps for HOH learners regarding access to meaningful inclusive education. The report findings have revealed several challenges including lack of attention to learners' unique needs, fewer Special Needs Education Teachers and lack of in-service training for them, lack of assistive devices, no Captioning services, no statistical data, negative attitudes, poor support services, poor classroom acoustics and lack of policy guidelines and frameworks for handling HOH learners in inclusive schools.

Inclusive education is a transformative approach aimed at ensuring all learners—regardless of disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or gender—have equitable access to quality education within a supportive environment. Among these learners, those who are Hard-of-Hearing face unique challenges that require targeted attention.

Hard-Of-Hearing learners have partial hearing loss and primarily use spoken language for communication; although they often rely on hearing devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. Therefore, to fully participate in academic and social activities, they need support that enhances both auditory and visual communication.

Despite strong international commitments, such as Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), HOH learners frequently experience subtle exclusion. Their “invisible” disability can lead to overlooked needs, insufficient reasonable accommodation measures, or social stigma.

This handbook synthesizes research and best practices to equip educators, administrators, and policymakers with practical tools and strategies for understanding the special educational needs of learners who are hard of hearing. Its goal is to help identify HOH learners, design effective support systems for them, and monitor progress. This should ultimately enable these learners to reach their full academic and social potential within inclusive educational settings.

Part 2: Understanding Hard-of-Hearing Learners

Definition and Spectrum

The International Federation of Hard-of-Hearing People (IFHOH) defines hard-of-hearing (HOH) individuals as those with hearing loss who primarily communicate through spoken language. This group includes late-deafened individuals, cochlear implant users, and people with conditions such as tinnitus, Hyperacusis, Meniere's disease, or auditory processing disorders. The group also includes those who become totally deaf after acquisition of speech. Hearing loss severity ranges from:

- Mild (21–40 dB “an individual is able to hear some speech sounds but may find it difficult to hear soft sounds such as a whisper”),
- Moderate (41–70 dB “ makes hard and soft consonant sounds to become inaudible and speech becomes difficult to understand, particularly if there is background noise”),
- Severe (71–90 dB “an individual will hear no speech when a person is talking at a normal level but he/she can hear some loud sounds”),
- Profound (91+ dB “cannot hear sounds below 90 Decibels, such as a person opposite shouting at them or a TV turned on high”).

Communication Modes

Hard-Of-Hearing learners often:

- Rely on speech and speech reading (lipreading).
- Use hearing aids, cochlear implants or other assistive listening devices.
- Benefit from visual communication aids, such as written text or sign-supported speech.
- Require sound-field systems or FM loops, especially in noisy environments.

Implications for Learning

Research by Marschark et al. (2017) shows that unaddressed hearing challenges may cause delays or difficulties in:

- Vocabulary and language development (poor pronunciation of words and omission of some speech sounds).
- Literacy and academic skills (gaps in written work).
- Active classroom participation (shows little interest in group activities and may prefer to stay alone).

- Confidence, social engagement, and peer relationships (often withdraws from some social settings).

Cultural Identity

Some HOH learners identify with Deaf culture, particularly if they use sign language or have Deaf family members and peers while others identify with the broader community of people with hearing loss in relation to their own unique experiences acquired from the hearing community. Educators must recognize and respect these diverse identities, language preferences, Bilingualism, and communication choices available to hard of hearing people.

Unlike learners who are profoundly deaf and rely primarily on sign language, HOH learners benefit most from tailored speech-based interventions (lipreading and captioning), combined with Assistive Technology devices to support their access to the spoken language and classroom content.

Part 3: Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Handbook

This handbook is designed to support inclusive education for Hard-Of-Hearing learners by providing practical guidance and tools for educators and stakeholders. Its aim is to enhance awareness, improve educational practices, and strengthen partnerships to ensure HOH learners receive quality and equitable education.

Objectives of the handbook

- To clarify the distinct educational needs of HOH learners.
- To guide teachers in applying inclusive teaching and effective communication strategies.
- To promote structured planning, support, and monitoring systems, including the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), checklists, and review templates.
- To encourage resource allocation that aligns with both international standards and local guidelines for Special Needs Education (SNE).
- To foster collaborative engagement of parents, caregivers, SNE specialists, community health workers, and policymakers in supporting HOH learners.

Intended Audience

The users of this handbook are diverse, listed as follows:

- Mainstream classroom teachers
- Special Needs Education (SNE) specialists
- School administrators and leaders
- Parents, caregivers, and members of communities where HOH people live.
- Educational policymakers and ministry officials

N.B. a detailed explanation of the roles of the different stakeholders can be found in part 9 of this handbook.

Part 4: Guiding Principles for Inclusive Education

Inclusion goes beyond merely placing learners with disabilities, including those who are Hard of Hearing, in the same classroom. It requires intentional planning, collaboration, and ongoing support across the education system. The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) Article 24** and **General Comment No. 4 (2016)** affirm that inclusive education involves systemic reform, not just physical placement. In order to realise this, the key guiding principles include:

1. **Equity:** Every learner deserves personalized support to reach their full potential, regardless of their abilities or background.
2. **Access:** Schools must proactively remove physical, auditory, and attitudinal barriers to ensure full participation of all learners.
3. **Participation:** HOH learners and their families should be actively involved in educational planning and decision-making.
4. **Collaboration:** Inclusive education requires joint efforts among teachers, audiologists, school leaders, families, and support staff.
5. **Flexibility:** Teaching methods, communication strategies, and classroom structures must be adaptable to accommodate the evolving academic, social, and hearing needs of HOH learners.
6. **Non-Discrimination:** All learners have the right to quality education without discrimination. Reasonable accommodation must be made based on individual needs, not limited by diagnoses.
7. **Individualized Support:** Learners should receive tailored services and resources necessary for meaningful learning experiences.
8. **Systemic Reform:** Inclusion demands changes in curriculum, pedagogy, infrastructure, and assessment to reflect diverse learning styles.
9. **Teacher Responsibility:** Educators play a central role in implementing inclusive practices and ensuring no learner is left behind.
10. **Continuous Improvement:** Inclusion is a dynamic process that requires ongoing assessment, refinement, and responsiveness to learner feedback.

Part 5: Framework for Supporting HOH Learners

This handbook adopts a **four-step framework** for guiding identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes for learners with special educational needs.

Step 1: Identification

Schools can identify pupils' educational needs, to include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The framework recommends undertaking the following on Hard-Of-Hearing learners:

- Screening hearing at school entry.
- Conducting observations for signs like inattentiveness, language delays, or social withdrawal.
- Using a **Learning Environment Checklist** to detect acoustical and visual barriers.
- Gathering input from parents and audiologists.

Step 2: Intervention

Once needs are identified, plan a range of supports to enhance learning. These include:

- Preferential seating.
- Provision of FM systems or hearing loops.
- Provision of captioning apps and real-time transcription tools.
- Implement differentiated instruction — visual aids, hands-on materials.
- Enable peer-assisted learning and social skills development.

Step 3: Monitoring & Review

learners' progress in relation to achieving their targets should be regularly and carefully monitored. This step in the framework entails the following tasks:

- Set **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound (SMART)** goals in Individualized Support Plans.
- Observe progress and record changes in listening, participation, and academic skills.
- Adjust interventions if progress stalls or new challenges emerge.

Step 4: Resource Allocation

This step is premised on the understanding that government, through the Education Service Commission and Ministry of Education and Sports, does the recruitment of SNE teachers and the disbursement of funds to schools having learners with special education needs. This step involves the following:

- Deploy SNE teachers strategically to support mainstream teachers in the class where HOH learners exist.
- Seek funding and partnerships for hearing aids and captioning tools.
- Invest in teacher training workshops.
- Prioritize accessibility across all school infrastructure.

Part 6: Step-by-Step Guide for Implementation

Supporting Hard-Of-Hearing learners in inclusive schools requires a structured, responsive, and collaborative approach. Below is a detailed step-by-step guide to help educators, support staff, and school leaders to plan and deliver inclusive support effectively.

Step 1: Identifying Needs

Early identification of the special educational needs of HOH learners ensures timely support and minimizes academic and social gaps. Therefore, a variety of tools and approaches should be used to detect hearing challenges and their educational impact. **Key Methods for doing this include:**

- Hearing screenings and referrals to audiologists
- Informal speech and listening assessments
- Teacher observations in class and during group activities
- Parental input and learner interviews
- Assessment of language, literacy, and social skills

Recommended Screening Tools:

- **Basic Needs Checklist** (covers hearing, participation and social interaction)
- **Learning Environment Checklist** (evaluates auditory and visual access in class)
- **Teacher Observation Records**
- **Communication and Listening Assessment Tools**

Step 2: Developing Support Plans

Once needs are identified, create tailored plans that reflect the learner's strengths, challenges, and preferences. The following are the **types of Support Plans:**

- **Classroom Support Plan** – minor adjustments within regular teaching
- **School Support Plan** – structured interventions requiring collaboration
- **School Support Plus** – multi-agency or specialized involvement.

It is worth noting that each Hard-Of-Hearing learner should also have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which Should Include the following:

- A strengths and needs profile
- Clearly defined learning goals
- Specific reasonable accommodation options (e.g., captioning, Assistive Technology)
- A schedule for regular reviews and updates
- Involvement of the learner and their parents/guardians

Step 3: Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

Effective classroom strategies can significantly improve the learning experience for Hard-Of-Hearing learners. Teachers should consistently implement **instructional Adjustments, Environmental Supports, communication supports, and peer and social inclusion. Details of each of these supports are given below:**

i) Instructional Adjustments:

- Multi-sensory teaching (oral, visual, and written methods)
- Visual aids and written instructions
- Simplified language and clear, concise directions
- Scaffolding for complex concepts
- Repetition and comprehension checks

ii) Environmental Supports:

- Preferential seating (e.g., near the teacher or near a sound source)
- Quiet learning spaces or reduced noise environments
- Visual schedules and timers

iii) Communication Supports:

- Captioned videos and real-time transcription
- Note-taking assistance or peer scribes
- Speech-to-text applications or FM systems
- Homework provided in written form

iv) **Peer and Social Inclusion**

- Group work with peer buddies
- Cooperative learning structures
- Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS)

Step 4: Use of Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology plays a crucial role in enabling access for Hard-Of-Hearing learners. **Examples Include:**

- Hearing aids
- Cochlear implants
- FM systems and induction loop systems
- Real-time captioning and visual alert systems
- Portable sound amplifiers
- Infrared listening devices
- Tablets or laptops with speech-to-text software

Step 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring ensures that strategies are working and allows for timely adjustments. The following must be catered for in an effective monitoring framework:

i) Assessment Tools:

- SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)
- Observation logs and teacher notes
- Learner self-assessments and reflections
- Students work samples and progress portfolios
- Parent and external professional feedback

ii) Review Frequency:

- Termly reviews or more frequently if needed
- Updates based on changes in learner behavior, engagement, or academic performance

N.B. Tracking progress ensures accountability and keeps the learner at the center of the support process.

Part 7: Allocation and Management of Teaching Resources

Effective inclusion of Hard-of-Hearing learners depends not only on teaching strategies but also on the **thoughtful allocation and flexible management of resources**. Schools must ensure that support is **needs-based**, responsive, and sustainable.

Guiding Principles

- **Needs-Based Allocation:** Resources should be allocated based on individual learner needs, not solely on diagnostic labels.
- **Flexibility:** Resource allocation should be adaptable—support may vary over time and between settings (e.g., whole class vs. small-group instruction).
- **Early Intervention Focus:** Prioritize investment in early-grade interventions to maximize impact and long-term inclusion.
- **Equity Across Contexts:** Rural and urban schools may require different resource strategies, but all should strive for functional access.
- **Collaboration & Oversight:** Engage ministries, district education offices, and school administrators in planning and monitoring resource use.

Types of Resources to Consider

i) Human Resources

- Trained Special Needs Education (SNE) teachers
- Sign language interpreters (where applicable)
- Teaching assistants or peer mentors
- Inclusion coordinators and learning support teams

ii) Material & Technological Resources

- Visual teaching aids (charts, flashcards and gesture cards)
- Laptops or tablets with speech-to-text and captioning tools
- FM systems or induction loop systems for hearing support
- Mobile apps designed for auditory processing or classroom communication
- Visual cue posters and classroom signage

iii) Time and Planning Resources

- Allocated time for teacher collaboration and co-planning
- Structured observation and reflection time for adjusting supports

Example Applications:

- a) A **rural school** may use local government or community support to purchase a basic FM system for one classroom.
- b) An **urban school** might invest in school-wide induction systems, visual cue signage, and teacher training on inclusive technology.

N.B. Resource allocation should be intentional, inclusive and equitable, ensuring that every HOH learner receives the support they need to succeed, regardless of their location or background.

Part 8: Effective School Infrastructure and Environment

Creating an inclusive environment for Hard-of-Hearing learners requires intentional design of physical spaces that support both auditory and visual needs. A well-adapted school infrastructure enhances learning, communication, safety, and social participation.

Key Features of an Inclusive Environment include:

- **Acoustic Adaptations** (Use wall padding, carpets, acoustic ceiling tiles, or panels) to reduce noise and echo, creating a quieter learning space.
- **Optimal Lighting** -- Ensure classrooms are well-lit to support clear lip-reading and visual communication.
- **Quiet Zones.** Designate and maintain quiet rooms or zones for focused, one-to-one instruction or when HOH learners need reduced sensory input.
- **Seating Arrangements.** Arrange seats to optimize visibility and hearing, such as placing HOH learners near the teacher or main sound source; or arrange the class in a u-shape or semi-circle to maximize on interaction.
- **Visual Signage and Cues.** Use clear, color-coded signs and visual prompts throughout the school to aid navigation and communication.
- **Access to Technology.** Provide reliable electricity and infrastructure to support Assistive Technology devices and tech-enabled learning tools.

Design for Safety and Inclusion

- **Supervision of Secluded Areas.** Ensure areas like corridors, playground corners, and restrooms are monitored to prevent bullying and foster safety.
- **Inclusive Access to Facilities.** Encourage HOH learners to participate fully in co-curricular spaces such as libraries, science labs, and sports facilities, providing any necessary support.

N.B. By investing in these infrastructure improvements, schools create an environment where HOH learners can thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Part 9: The Role of Stakeholders

Successful inclusion of HOH learners depends on active collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders. Each plays a distinct but interconnected role in ensuring effective support and learning outcomes. The following are some of the essential stakeholders and their roles:

i) Teachers:

- Implement daily classroom adaptations and inclusive teaching strategies.
- Monitor learner progress and adjust support as needed.
- Participate in ongoing training on inclusive education and Assistive Technology solutions.

ii) Special Needs Education (SNE) Specialists:

- Provide direct, hands-on teaching and support for HOH learners.
- Conduct assessments and track progress.
- Train and mentor mainstream teachers to enhance their inclusive practices.

iii) Parents and Families:

Research shows that active involvement of parents and the family significantly improves educational outcomes for Hard-of-Hearing learners. Inclusive education thrives when families are partners in the learning process. **The role of parents and families is broken down as follows:**

- Participate actively in support planning and review meetings each term.
- Provide or facilitate access to hearing devices and reinforce learning strategies at home.
- Receive training on effective communication techniques tailored to HOH learners.
- Engage in peer-support groups to share experiences and strategies.
- Share vital information about the learner's hearing aids, communication preferences, and routines.
- Advocate for necessary support and accommodations within the school and community.

iv) School Leaders and Administrators:

- Develop and enforce inclusive education policies.
- Allocate resources and secure funding for inclusive programs and technologies.
- Foster partnerships with health professionals, NGOs, and community organizations.

v) Community and Health Service Providers:

- Offer hearing screenings, audiology services, and device maintenance.
- Conduct workshops and awareness programs for parents and educators.
- Organize awareness sessions to promote understanding of hearing impairment and inclusion.
- Assist with early identification and referral of learners with hearing difficulties.
- Collaborate with local NGOs and health services to provide resources such as hearing devices.
- Establish support networks that connect families, schools, and service providers.

vi) Policy Makers and NGOs:

- Support legislation and policies that promote inclusive education.
- Provide funding, resources, and capacity-building initiatives.

In summary, each stakeholder's contribution is vital to creating a learning environment where HOH learners are fully supported and empowered to succeed. For example, building strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities ensures that HOH learners receive a consistent and supportive environment both in and outside the classroom.

Part 10: Enabling Factors for Successful Inclusion

Successful inclusion of Hard-of-Hearing learners depends on a range of interconnected factors that create a supportive environment at all levels. These may **include**:

- **Adequate Funding.** Provision for Assistive Technology in form of hearing aids,, and continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers.
- **Strong Policy Support.** National and school-level policies that prioritize inclusive education and provide clear guidelines and resources.
- **Positive School Culture.** Promotion of respectful attitudes, anti-bullying measures, and awareness to combat stigma associated with hearing loss.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration.** Effective partnerships between schools, health professionals, social service providers, and community organizations to offer holistic support.
- **Time and Resources for Collaboration.** Allocated time for team teaching, teacher collaboration, and regular parent consultations.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Systems.** School-wide tracking mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of inclusion strategies and identify areas for improvement is vital.
- **Socioeconomic Support.** Addressing affordability challenges to ensure learners can access necessary hearing devices and resources.

By addressing these enabling factors, schools can build an inclusive learning environment that supports HOH learners to thrive academically and socially.

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9. **United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. (2016). *General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the Right to Inclusive Education*. Available at <https://undocs.org/CRPD/C/GC/4>
10. Various participatory **focus group reports** and **stakeholder consultation documents** on inclusive education, accessible via Ministry of Education archives or NGO publications (dates and exact titles may vary).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Individual Education Plan (IEP) Template

Section	Details
Learner Name:	
Date of Birth:	
Grade/Class:	
Date of IEP Creation:	
Strengths:	
Areas of Need:	
Hearing Profile:	(e.g., degree of hearing loss, devices used)
Learning Goals:	1.
	2.
	3.
Accommodation/Supports:	- Preferential seating
	- Use of FM system
	- Visual aids
	- Captioning services
Instructional Strategies:	
Assistive Technology:	
Review Schedule:	(e.g., every term, date of next review)
Parents/Guardians Involved:	Yes / No
Comments:	

Appendix B: Screening and Observation Checklists

1. Basic Needs Checklist

- Hearing difficulties noticed: Yes / No
- Signs of inattentiveness: Yes / No
- Social withdrawal observed: Yes / No
- Speech delays: Yes / No
- Use of hearing aids/devices: Yes / No
- Notes:

2. Learning Environment Checklist

- Classroom acoustics quiet and clear: Yes / No
- Seating arranged for best hearing: Yes / No
- Visual supports visible and accessible: Yes / No
- Lighting adequate for lipreading: Yes / No
- Noise distractions minimized: Yes / No
- Notes:

3. Teacher Observation Record

- Student's attention during instruction: Good / Fair / Poor
- Participation in group activities: Good / Fair / Poor
- Response to verbal instructions: Good / Fair / Poor
- Peer interactions: Positive / Neutral / Negative
- Notes:

4. Communication and Listening Assessment Tools

(Use as appropriate)

- Speech discrimination score_____
- Listening fatigue signs: Yes / No
- Response latency: _____ seconds
- Notes:

Appendix C: Inclusive Classroom Strategies Quick Reference

Strategy	Description	Example Use
Multi-sensory Teaching	Use oral, visual, and written methods together	Combine spoken instructions with visuals
Preferential Seating	Seat HOH learner close to teacher or sound source	Front row seating near speaker
Visual Aids	Use charts, flashcards, written instructions	Written homework, illustrated notes
Simplified Language	Use short, clear sentences	"Please open your book to page 5."
Repetition & Checking Understanding	Repeat key points and ask questions	"Can you tell me what to do next?"
Captioning & Transcription	Use captioned videos or speech-to-text apps	During video lessons or group talks
Peer Buddy System	Pair learner with a supportive classmate	Study partners, note takers

Appendix D: Resource Allocation Planning Worksheet

Resource Type	Description	Quantity Needed	Current Availability	Notes/Action Needed
Human Resources	SNE Teachers, teaching assistants			
Assistive Technology	Hearing aids, FM systems, captioning			
Teaching Materials	Visual aids, printed handouts			
Time Allocation	Time for co-planning and observation			
Training & Capacity	Workshops, refresher courses			

Appendix E: Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities Chart

Stakeholder	Primary Responsibilities
Teachers	Adapt lessons, monitor progress, engage in training
SNE Specialists	Provide direct support, assess needs, train mainstream teachers
Parents/Caregivers	Share info on hearing devices, advocate, support at home
School Leaders	Develop policies, secure resources, foster partnerships
Health Services	Conduct screenings, maintain devices, run parent workshops
Policy Makers/NGOs	Fund programs, develop legislation, build capacity

Appendix F: Monitoring and Evaluation Log Template

Date	Goal/Objectives	Progress Observed	Comments/Concerns	Next Steps