

## Communication Behavior of an LGBTQ+ Teenager with Cochlear Implant: A Case Study

by:

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**Abstract.** *Communication is an essential aspect of the holistic development of individuals. The study investigated the communication behavior of a twenty-year-old LGBTQ+ individual with a cochlear implant. The case study was conducted from September to October 2021. The subject was observed face-to-face conversations with family members and friends who visited their house and through online means during synchronous classes and video calls with friends. The result showed that the subject had difficulty speaking her thoughts; most of the time, she stammered. The findings also showed the subject has difficulty establishing social relations with her classmates since most prefer to have friends with no speaking impairment. The study divulged some teaching and assessment strategies that could help individuals with cochlear implants. Also, the study recommended future research that may help parents and teachers understand that students with cochlear implants may perform academically but struggle to cope with the challenges and mingle in society.*

**Keywords:** *Hearing Impairment, Cochlear Implant, Teaching Strategy, Assessment Strategy, Descriptive Case Study*

### INTRODUCTION

LGBTQ+ Communities are often ridiculed in society due to their gender preferences and upbringing. As defined by OK2BME (2020), LGBTQ+ is an acronym used to stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Transexual, Queer, or Questioning, while the (+) stands for a pansexual, genderqueer, ally, agender, bigender, and the likes.

In this study, the communication behavior of an LGBTQ+ teenager with a cochlear implant was investigated. Mayo Clinic (2021) mentioned that Cochlear Implant is done on people with severe hearing impairment caused by aging, loud noise, occupational noises, heredity, recreational noises, strong medication, and illnesses.

In connection with these notions, the communication behavior of an LGBTQ+ teenager with hearing impairment was explored.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study explored the communication behavior of an LGBTQ+ teenager with pre-lingual hearing loss who had undergone a cochlear implant at an early age.

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How can the participant's communication behavior with her family, friends, classmates, and other people in the community during face-to-face, online classes, and video calls be described in terms of:

- a. facial expression;
  - b. gestures; and
  - c. speaking skills?
2. What difficulties does the participant encounter in communicating with her family, friends, classmates, and community members?
  3. What are the possible strategies and solutions to the problems experienced

Table 1

Communication Behavior During Face-to-Face Setup

Facial Expression	Most of the times, displayed various facial expressions like happy, lonely, excited, and other expressions showing different emotions while talking to her family, friends, and classmates and posed a very serious expression with other people.
Gesture	She used hand gestures, and movements when talking with her family and classmates but observed to use sign language most of the time when talking with her friends.
Speaking Skills	She can communicate with the people in her surrounding and answered them whenever asked, however, one cannot comprehend her answers unless they listened thoroughly. Sometime she stammered when answering or she did not answer in complete sentence but she answered in fragments or phrases.

by LGBTQ+ teenagers in communicating with various groups of people?

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study utilized Descriptive Case Study. As defined by Mills et al. (2010), a Descriptive Case Study is a focused and detailed analysis of a phenomenon being scrutinized.

The subject of this study is a twenty-year-old Lesbian teenager diagnosed with severe congenital hearing loss when she was a baby and had undergone a cochlear implant when she was still one year old. Currently, she is a

grade ten student in one of the prestigious schools here in Bataan. As observed, she is a very polite gal who loves video editing and watching Korean movies but prefers to be alone in the comforts of her room. Also, for ethical considerations, the subject of the study is assigned the code name "Alita."

The observation was used to investigate the communication behavior of the subject from September to October 2021. The subject was observed four times a week during face-to-face tutorial sessions and her conversations with friends and families in both face-to-face and online setups.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the study is presented in the following:

### A. Communication Behavior During Face-to-Face Sessions

Communication is a two-way street. The receiver will receive the message from the sender through a medium or channel. For two months, the subject was observed, and Table 1 below presents the communication behavior of the subject.

The subject displayed typical facial expressions and gestures from the table while conversing with her friends, family, and classmates, but problems could be observed once she spoke. She either stammers or answers in a telegraphic manner and sometimes answers only in phrases but not in complete sentences to explain her thoughts.

As May-Mederake and Shehata-Dieler (2013) explain, the cochlear implant helps a patient's speech production and grammar

development. Also, John Hopkins Medicine (2021) stressed that a cochlear implant device is an electronic device that electrically stimulates the cochlear nerve (nerve for hearing). This is much different than a hearing aid since a hearing aid only increases the loudness of a sound but does not help to develop the comprehension ability of the patient.

In the case of Alita, she can comprehend the questions asked but sometimes exhibits difficulties in expressing her thoughts through speaking during face-to-face contact.

### B. Communication Behavior During Online Classes and Video Calls

On the other hand, when observed during online classes and video calls with friends, Table 2 presents the communication behavior of Alita.

Facial Expression	In 16 out of 24 observed synchronous classes, Alita displayed solemn facial expressions and seldom participated in class discussion. However, when video calling with friends she showed happy face and laughed most of the time despite the silent conversation that transpired between them since they used signed language.
Gesture	She used hand gestures, nods, and body language to show her uneasiness during synchronous classes especially subjects that demanded oral recitations.
Speaking Skills	She seldom participated in online class discussion but when asked to recite, she answered outrightly but stammered most of the time or mispronounced the words most of the time. But during video calls with friends, she was observed to use sign language than answering them orally.

Table 2 displayed that Alita exhibited agitation during synchronous classes but relaxed while talking with her friends.

### C. Communication Difficulties that Alita Encountered

Based on casual conversations, Alita divulged that she preferred the companion of girls to boys and narrated that she has a current relationship with a mute girl living in Manila. She reiterated that she was often bullied when she was young because of speech difficulty and a longer time to process and give her response.

As displayed in the study of Tye-Murray (2003) conducted on 181 cochlear implant users and 24 children with normal hearing engaged in conversations with a clinician using an oral mode of communication, the audio-video recordings were analyzed. They showed that children with significant hearing loss often experience difficulty engaging in everyday conversations. They may spend an excessive amount of time in communication breakdown or silence. In a similar study conducted by Zhao et al. (2008), adult people before cochlear implants complained about the inability to communicate, feelings of isolation, failure to use the phone, and inability to understand television shows and music, and the study showed that gradually patients changed their perspectives. However, most of them still experienced communication difficulties.

Another problem that she mentioned was often being misunderstood. She has good intentions, but other people interpret her answers differently. Aside from that, only a few of her classmates talked to her during the old normal when classes were done face-to-face. In this connection, Rich et al. (2013) study revealed that adolescents with cochlear implants have difficulty coping with school, society, and establishing self-identity. In their research, twelve teenagers (14–18 years old) with cochlear implants participated in the study. The findings revealed that the

participants had difficulty comprehending a class with so many speakers talking simultaneously in the world of hearing people. Most of them were avoided by hearing people because they preferred to have friends with the same hearing ability.

#### **D. Possible Solutions and Strategies to Address the Problems Experienced by People and LGBTQ+ Teenagers with Cochlear Implants**

As mentioned by Mara (2021), the government, companies, schools, and society should extend equal opportunities to people who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. The experience felt by the participant in terms of her gender preferences should be dealt with carefully by the guidance counselor as well as the school head of the school because the Department of Education already incorporates gender equality in their Gender and Development Program through the virtue of Executive Order No 23 s. 1995 assigned by the former President Fidel V. Ramos.

On the other hand, English (2013) mentioned that noncochlear should understand that these individuals with cochlear implants display a different range of emotions. In this context, the guidance counselor in Alita's school should have a guidance and counseling program for students with cochlear implants to understand their feelings better, help them develop self-esteem, and cope with the challenges brought by socialization with the people around them.

In terms of classroom management and assessment, ADCET (2021) has recommended the following teaching strategies:

1. Encourage students to sit in front so that their line of vision will not be hampered.

2. Do not talk when facing the blackboard.
3. Provide written materials to supplement all lectures, tutorials, and laboratory sessions.
4. Any videos or films used should, where possible, be captioned. When this is impossible, you will need to consider alternative ways to access the information for students with hearing impairment.
5. Hearing loss often affects language abilities, depending on the age of onset. Students with hearing disabilities encounter literacy issues. In some cases, providing reading lists well before the start of a course for students with hearing loss can be beneficial. Consider tailoring these reading lists when necessary, and provide guide key texts.

On the other, below are the suggested assessment strategies:

1. Provide alternatives to assignments based on interviews or questionnaires, and be flexible with assignment deadlines, particularly if students have had to wait for transcripts of learning sessions.
2. Provide extra time in examinations, particularly spare time for reading questions. Some students prefer to have questions and instructions 'signed' to them.

Aside from the abovementioned strategies and assessment strategies, Fickenscher et al. (2015) stated that techniques like auditory closure, auditory first, and an auditory sandwich can be used to develop the listening and speaking skills of hearing learners but cannot be applied to the general population of



individuals with cochlear implants. Furthermore, Moberly et al. (2016) stressed that people with cochlear implant varies in cognition and information-processing skills.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

From the findings of the study, the following conclusions were formulated:

- People with cochlear implants experience difficulties dealing with people and participating in day-to-day conversations.
- Cochlear implants helped them hear and comprehend, but they exhibited trouble speaking.
- LGBTQ+ teenagers with cochlear implants faced isolation due to difficulty in speaking and gender biases in society.
- People with cochlear implants experience hearing and speaking difficulties and social problems since most of their classmates or coworkers prefer to communicate with people who do not have hearing or speaking impairment.
- Coping mechanisms and better teaching strategies can help people with cochlear implants improve their comprehension and speaking skills.

On the other hand, the following recommendations are suggested:

- The study recommended that parents and teachers understand that persons with cochlear implants may perform better academically. Still, they have

difficulty coping socially in their classrooms and workplace.

- The study also suggested conducting future studies on improving people's reasoning and speaking skills with a cochlear implant.

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