THE INNOVATION OF INCLUSIVITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEAF INTERPRETER

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Abstract

The Indonesian government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in New York on March 30, 2007. This commitment mandates the government to implement these rights and ensure that people with disabilities can participate in all aspects of life, including access to technology, information, and communication. This research examines how implementing deaf interpreters can innovate public relations inclusivity within Indonesian higher education institutions. Through qualitative content analysis, the study examines graduation ceremonies broadcast on YouTube from 2021 to 2023 from Indonesia's leading universities. These ceremonies were selected as research objects due to their rich demonstration of public relations practices. Using semiotic analysis and innovation diffusion theory as theoretical frameworks, the research reveals that deaf interpreter implementation represents a significant innovation in higher education public relations inclusivity. The findings indicate that only a few of Indonesia's top universities - Gadjah Mada University, Brawijaya University, Bandung Institute of Technology, and Padjadjaran University - have implemented deaf interpreters in their graduation ceremonies. The research suggests that the broader implementation of deaf interpreters in graduation ceremonies could foster more inclusive social, educational, cultural, and communication environments across higher education institutions. Additionally, the study highlights the unique context of Indonesia's dual sign language system (SIBI and BISINDO), emphasizing the importance of linguistic and cultural considerations in implementation.

Keywords: *deaf interpreter*; Inclusivity; higher education; graduation ceremonies; public relations

INTRODUCTION

The commitment to "No one left behind" was collectively agreed upon at the United Nations meeting in September 2015 in New York (Nusrat Afroz & Zul Ilham, 2020). One hundred ninety-three countries agreed and committed to achieving 17 Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), encompassing 169 targets and 232 indicators that must be adopted by all nations worldwide, including Indonesia, to improve global conditions (Backes & Traverso, 2022). Each goal is interconnected and accelerates problem resolution. For instance, poverty alleviation and inequality reduction must be pursued simultaneously with strategies for improving health, education, and economic growth while addressing climate change and maintaining environmental, ocean, and forest sustainability (Nusrat Afroz & Zul Ilham, 2020).

On March 30, 2007, in New York, the Indonesian government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This commitment obligates the government to implement these rights and ensure that persons with disabilities can participate in all life aspects, including technology, information, and communication. Subsequently, in 2018, the United Nations held another meeting and general assembly focusing on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the importance of incorporating the needs of vulnerable individuals in the vision of inclusive sustainability for persons with disabilities in future development (Baig et al., 2022).

In the context of public relations (PR), which has officially entered Indonesia's academic realm since 1965 (Kriyantono, 2020), definitions range from the simple "doing good and getting credit for it" to more complex 100-word definitions (Hutomo, 2017). Public relations is an organization's crucial function, responsible for building, maintaining, and managing relationships with various stakeholders. PR practitioners communicate leadership policies and strategies, collaborate across departments, and work with external partners to develop cohesive organizational information (Indrayani et al., 2020). Like Semar and his companions in Javanese mythology, PR professionals act as wise advisors who can be readily accepted by their surroundings without superiority or inferiority complexes (Priyono, 2005).

The Indonesian regulatory framework supports inclusive education through various mechanisms. The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education mandates that institutions provide accessible facilities and infrastructure for students with special needs (Hikmah et al., 2021). This requirement is reinforced by Law Number 25 Article 40, which stipulates the government's obligation to organize and provide educational facilities for persons with disabilities across various pathways, types, and levels of education (Afifah & Hadi, 2018). However, disability service units in education have not been fully realized, and the government has not completely provided the necessary campus facilities for persons with disabilities (Sinaga, 2017).

In addressing the communication needs of the deaf community, Indonesia utilizes two primary sign languages: SIBI (Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia - Indonesian Sign System) and BISINDO (Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia - Indonesian Sign Language) (Gumelar et al., 2018). Implementing these two sign languages presents unique challenges and preferences within the deaf community. While SIBI is the official system, some groups find daily communication challenging due to vocabulary differences and expression preferences. BISINDO has emerged as a more natural alternative, evolving organically across various regions in Indonesia with distinct regional variations. Despite the coexistence of both systems, the deaf

community tends to favor BISINDO for its practicality and cultural resonance in daily communications (Umarella et al., 2023).

Specifically, disability is included in five main SDG targets related to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): Goal 4 on Education, Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities, Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities, and Goal 17 on Global Partnerships (Rifai & Humaedi, 2020). As Unterhalter (2019) emphasizes, ensuring equal access extends beyond merely enrolling marginalized groups in educational institutions; it requires comprehensive service provision and support systems.

The opportunity to pursue higher education significantly influences one's future success. However, deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) students face unique challenges compared to their hearing peers in college settings (Albash, 2023). Previous research has primarily focused on learning methods, as evidenced in studies such as "Fifty years on – and still no resolution: Deaf education, ideology, policy and the cost of resistance" (Fullwood & Levinson, 2023) and "Inclusive education and deaf learners" (Snoddon, 2023). To contribute novel insights, this study explores the public relations perspective of inclusive education.

The implementation of inclusive education requires multi-stakeholder involvement for maximum benefit, necessitating participation from educational institutions, communities, and families (Khayati et al., 2020). Higher education institutions serve as environments accommodating various activities, including academic, non-academic, and social interactions (Hikmah et al., 2021). This research examines whether implementing deaf interpreters can innovate public relations inclusivity within Indonesian higher education institutions, analyzing graduation ceremony content from top Indonesian universities broadcasted on YouTube from 2021 to 2023.

Through semiotic analysis complemented by innovation diffusion theory, this research confirms that deaf interpreters can significantly innovate higher education public relations inclusivity. Only a few of Indonesia's leading universities - including Gadjah Mada University, Brawijaya University, Bandung Institute of Technology, and Padjadjaran University - have implemented deaf interpreters at major events such as graduation ceremonies. This study advocates for broader adoption of deaf interpreter services, considering the linguistic and cultural nuances of both SIBI and BISINDO, to foster more inclusive social, educational, cultural, and communication environments in higher education institutions.

While extensive research exists on deaf education and sign language interpretation in higher education, most studies have focused on classroom settings and educational access. Raike and Ahlgren (2020) examined sign language policy and access to justice for the deaf community, while Cruz and Rinaldi (2021) systematically reviewed inclusive higher education practices for deaf students. In institutional settings, Napier and Leeson (2021) explored opportunities and challenges of sign language in higher education, primarily focusing on academic interactions and classroom communication. Hauser and Contreras (2020) further investigated support systems for deaf students in higher education, but their research concentrated on academic aspects rather than institutional communications.

Research on sign language interpretation in ceremonial or public relations contexts remains limited. Kushalnagar and Paludneviciene's (2021) meta-analysis of sign language interpretation in educational settings revealed a significant gap in research concerning

institutional events and public relations practices. The present study addresses this gap by examining deaf interpreter implementation, specifically in graduation ceremonies - a crucial public relations event in university settings. Furthermore, while previous studies have explored various aspects of deaf education and communication, none have specifically examined the innovative potential of deaf interpreter implementation from a public relations perspective in Indonesian higher education institutions, where both SIBI and BISINDO sign language systems are used.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology emphasizing a deep understanding of social phenomena, culture, and human behavior. The primary objective of qualitative research is to explore meanings, patterns, and nuances within a broader context. Qualitative research views meaning as an inseparable part of one's experience in social life with others (Bungin, 2017). It seeks to construct an understanding of phenomena and investigate issues related to the marginalization of specific individuals. The qualitative research process is inductive, where researchers derive meaning from collected field data (Creswell, 2014).

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which is a way of understanding the complexity of the real world (Mulyana, 2004). The constructivist paradigm was determined at the initial stage of this research as it is used to develop subjective meanings that are often socially and historically negotiated. Meaning must be constructed through interaction with historical and social norms in daily life. Fundamentally, this social environment creates meaning, emerging within and outside interactions with human communities.

The research objects comprise graduation live-streaming content from Indonesia's top universities, which are archived on their official YouTube channels. The researcher collected data related to these objects through internet search engines. The data includes graduation content from 2021, 2022, and 2023. Graduation content was selected as the research object because it contains numerous public relations practices throughout the event proceedings. Several leading universities in Yogyakarta were also included as research loci to complement the research data, as the researcher has extensively observed campuses in this student city. The total content analyzed consists of 21 videos, including findings from a global scale.

Research triangulation was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of research findings by combining several different approaches or data sources. Triangulation involves integrating various research aspects, resulting in stronger and more reliable outcomes through multi-source verification where various findings are correlated. In this research, data triangulation was performed by reviewing sources beyond YouTube, specifically through observation and literature review. After data collection, the researcher conducted a content analysis based on the theoretical foundation of innovation diffusion to connect with existing social realities (Nafiah & Azzahra, 2020).

Content Analysis is a qualitative research technique that explores communication message content, interprets meaning within message content, and understands symbols and

meanings contained in symbolic communication interactions. This approach aims to uncover information found in texts, images, audio, or other elements within a communication context. Content Analysis techniques assist researchers in identifying patterns, themes, and implications of encountered messages and enable a deeper understanding of how symbols are used and received in communication (Bungin, 2012).

The method section has been structured to maintain scientific rigor while ensuring clarity in explaining the research process. Integrating the constructivist paradigm with qualitative content analysis provides a robust framework for examining deaf interpreter implementation in university graduation ceremonies from a public relations perspective. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of explicit and implicit meanings in the observed communication practices.

DISCUSSION

Based on the Webometrics ranking, which evaluates universities based on their performance and impact in cyberspace, several of the best universities in Indonesia stand out in terms of online presence and impact on the internet. The ranking reflects how universities utilize technology and online communications to support education, research and communications. In the top ranking, the University of Indonesia (UI) occupies a superior position, followed by Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). They have a strong reputation for bringing academic information and resources online. Universitas Indonesia, being at the top, has established itself as a center of academic excellence in the digital scenario. Its various online platforms engage students, staff and researchers in learning and research.

Gadjah Mada University, which came in second, is important in supporting distance education and research dissemination through its online platforms. The Bandung Institute of Technology also consistently integrates digital technology into teaching and research methods. Meanwhile, Brawijaya University (UB), Airlangga University (UNAIR), Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), Sebelas Maret University (UNS), Diponegoro University (UNDIP), Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS), and Indonesian Education University (UPI) are all in the top 10 of Webometrics rankings, confirming their commitment to attendance. *Online is* the strong one. The ranking reflects the key role of universities in delivering high-quality education and research in Indonesia through technology and online communications. With the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the adoption of online education, the presence of universities in cyberspace has become increasingly important. It has become one of the main criteria for assessing a university's excellence in the digital scenario (Webometrics, 2023).

Figure 1. Ten Best Universities in Indonesia

In universities that have implemented it, *deaf interpreter*

Table 1. Live Streaming of Gadjah Mada University Graduation

2021	2022	2023

The table above contains excerpts from a series of graduation events at Gadjah Mada University in 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2021, Gadjah Mada University has not yet presented a sign language interpreter. New in 2022 and beyond has featured a sign language interpreter from the beginning to the end of the video. The display of sign language is in the form of *overlay. T*he video is carefully designed to not interfere with the general view of the graduation ceremony. A small window in the lower right corner appears, displaying a sign language translator. The interpreter performs gestures in synchronization with the speech delivered during the event through hand movements, facial expressions and body language.

The translator appears in a small window integrated with the main video display so that the main message and moment of the graduate remains the main focus of the broadcast on *YouTube.* Meanwhile, viewers who need sign language can easily access the service.

Appearance *overlay* Sign language reflects a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, so all graduates, families and guests can experience the beauty and importance of the graduation moment. Aiming to ensure that no one feels marginalized or unable to participate in the event fully. With the help of technology, the hope is to strengthen the values of inclusivity and justice in higher education and provide a positive graduation experience for all university community members.

Table 2. Live Streaming of the Brawijaya University Graduation Ceremony

2021	2022	2023

The table above contains excerpts from Brawijaya University's 2021, 2022 and 2023 series of graduation events. In 2021, Brawijaya University has not yet presented a sign language interpreter. New in 2022 and beyond has featured a sign language interpreter from the beginning to the end of the video. The sign language display is in the form of a carefully designed video overlay so that it does not interfere with the general view of the graduation ceremony. The year 2022 is in the bottom right corner, and 2023 is in the left corner of the video. The interpreter performs gestures in synchronization with the speech delivered during the event through hand movements, facial expressions and body language.

The translator appears in a small window integrated with the main video display so that the main message and moment of the graduate remain the main focus of the broadcast on *YouTube.* Meanwhile, viewers who need sign language can easily access the service. Appearance *overlay* Sign language reflects a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, so all graduates, families and guests can experience the beauty and importance of the graduation moment. Aiming to ensure that no one feels marginalized or unable to participate in the event fully. With the help of technology, the hope is to strengthen the values of inclusivity and justice in higher education and provide a positive graduation experience for all university community members.

Table 3. Live Streaming Graduation Bandung Institute of Technology

2021	2022	2023

The table above contains excerpts from the Bandung Institute of Technology's 2021, 2022 and 2023 series of graduation events. In 2021, the Bandung Institute of Technology has not yet presented a sign language interpreter. New in 2022 and beyond has featured a sign language interpreter from the beginning to the end of the video. The sign language display is in the form of a carefully designed video overlay so that it does not interfere with the general view of the graduation ceremony. In the lower right corner, a small window appears displaying a sign language translator. The interpreter performs gestures in synchronization with the speech delivered during the event through hand movements, facial expressions and body language.

The translator appears in a small window integrated with the main video display so that the main message and moment of the graduate remain the main focus of the broadcast on *YouTube.* Meanwhile, viewers who need sign language can easily access the service. Appearance *overlay* Sign language reflects a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, so all graduates, families and guests can experience the beauty and importance of the graduation moment. Aiming to ensure that no one feels marginalized or unable to participate in the event fully. With the help of technology, the hope is to strengthen the values of inclusivity and justice in higher education and provide a positive graduation experience for all university community members.

Table 4. Live Streaming of Padjadjaran University Graduation

2021	2022	2023

The table above contains snapshot images from the graduation ceremonies at Padjadjaran University in 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2021, Padjadjaran University has not yet presented a sign language interpreter. New in 2022 and beyond has featured a sign language interpreter from the beginning to the end of the video. The display of sign language is in the form of *overlay. T*he video is carefully designed to not interfere with the general view of the graduation ceremony. A small window in the lower right corner appears, displaying a sign language translator. The interpreter performs gestures in synchronization with the speech delivered during the event through hand movements, facial expressions and body language.

The translator appears in a small window integrated with the main video display so that the main message and moment of the graduate remain the main focus of the broadcast on *YouTube.* Meanwhile, viewers who need sign language can easily access the service. Appearance *overlay* Sign language reflects a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, so all graduates, families and guests can experience the beauty and importance of the graduation moment. Aiming to ensure that no one feels marginalized or unable to participate in the event fully. With the help of technology, the hope is to strengthen the values of inclusivity and justice in higher education and provide a positive graduation experience for all university community members.

Table 5. Live Streaming Graduation at Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember

| 2021	2022	2023

The table above contains excerpts from the series of graduation ceremonies at the Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology in 2021, 2022, and 2023. In 2021 and 2022, the Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology **will** not yet feature a sign language interpreter. New in 2023 and beyond, it has featured a sign language interpreter from the beginning to the

end of the video. The sign language display is in the form of a carefully designed video overlay so that it does not interfere with the general view of the graduation ceremony. A small window in the lower right corner appears, displaying a sign language translator. The interpreter performs gestures in synchronization with the speech delivered during the event through hand movements, facial expressions and body language.

The translator appears in a small window integrated with the main video display so that the main message and moment of the graduate remains the main focus of the broadcast on *YouTube.* Meanwhile, viewers who need sign language can easily access the service. Appearance *overlay* Sign language reflects a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, so all graduates, families and guests can experience the beauty and importance of the graduation moment. Aiming to ensure that no one feels marginalized or unable to participate in the event fully. With the help of technology, the hope is to strengthen the values of inclusivity and justice in higher education and provide a positive graduation experience for all university community members.

Universities that have not yet featured *deaf interpreter*
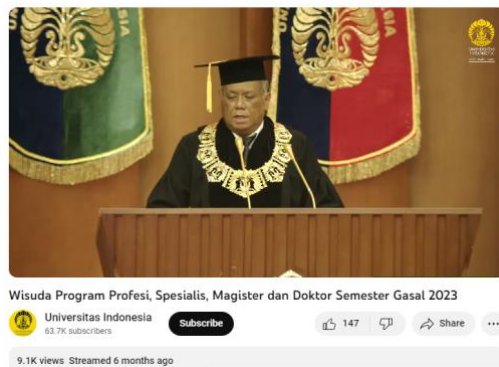
University of Indonesia	
Bogor Agricultural Institute	

University Indonesian Education	Wisuda Gelombang II Tahun 2023 Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Hari-1)
Sebelas Maret University	Wisuda Periode 7 Tahun 2023 Universitas Sebelas Maret
Diponegoro University	Wisuda ke-170 Universitas Diponegoro | Tahap 8
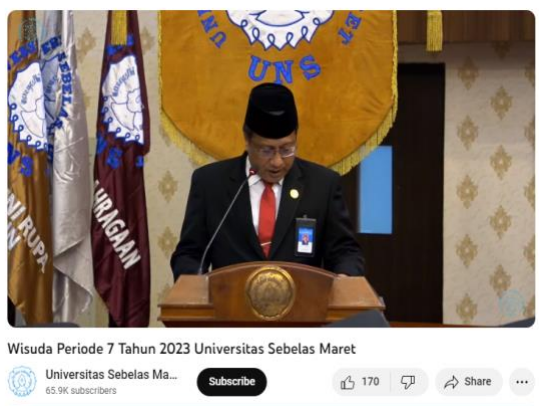
The lack of implementation of sign language interpreters at graduation ceremonies is a gap that must be evaluated in depth. From the table above, five of the ten best universities in Indonesia have not implemented a *deaf interpreter* at the graduation ceremony. This indicates that inclusiveness in public relations and the educational context, namely higher education, has not been fully achieved. For example, as the number one best university, the University of Indonesia has not implemented its *overlay* sign language interpreter until 2023. However, it has played an important role in providing high-quality education and maintaining its reputation as one of the best universities in Indonesia. However, to achieve inclusivity and

fairness in higher education, some aspects need further evaluation, like other universities in Indonesia.

Implementation of Public Relations Inclusivity at Graduation Celebrations

Sign language interpreters on a global scale have also been implemented at universities abroad, even long before Indonesia started using them. Ohio University founded the program, which has been implemented since 2019—earlier than several universities in Indonesia, which, on average, implemented sign language interpreters in 2022.

Figure 2. Implementation of a Sign Language Interpreter in the lower left corner
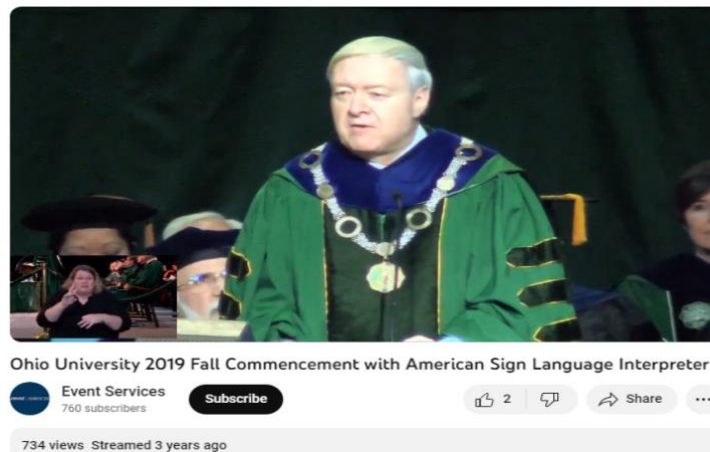
Graduation is a ceremony or celebration held by an educational institution that marks academic achievement, transformation, and transition to the next stage in the graduates' personal and professional lives. At the university level, graduation is a ceremonial event for students who have completed a study program to receive an academic degree. Students who have met the graduation requirements are recognized as official college graduates. During graduation ceremonies, students wear different academic togas and hats depending on their degree (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree). Each student attending the graduation ceremony was called by name and invited to walk up to the stage to receive a diploma from college officials.

Graduation is an important and valuable moment in the lives of students, families and universities. The event is held formally, with various rituals, processions, and speeches. Announcements and information about graduation usually come from the University Academic Directorate. The academic office manages the academic and administrative requirements necessary for graduation. This includes ensuring that graduates meet the requirements for their respective degrees. The chancellor or high-ranking university official has the main role in supervising and giving final approval regarding the graduation ceremony. The role and structure of the graduation committee may vary between universities. For example, at the

Islamic University of Indonesia, the graduation ceremony is represented by one main or graduation committee from several different directorates.

Another finding from this research is that graduation and public relations *(public relations)* are two things that are related in the world of education and higher education. Based on previous theory, public relations is responsible for building, maintaining, and managing relationships between the organization and various relevant stakeholders or the public. The presence of public relations at graduation events plays an important role in promoting, organizing and providing information related to graduation events. From disseminating information, the university or college public relations team promotes the graduation event to graduates, their families and the wider community. Practices can use various communication channels, such as social media, websites, electronic mail, and printed materials, to disseminate information regarding graduation schedules, regulations, and preparations.

Public relations is responsible for coordinating the event on the day the agenda takes place. Play a role in coordinating logistics and communication with participants, including coordination with high-ranking university officials. The presence of a public relations team ensures that the graduation event runs smoothly and ensures that all technical preparations have been completed. Public relations can also establish relationships with local or national mass media to provide coverage of graduation events. This can increase media presence and provide further recognition to the university or college. After the graduation ceremony, public relations focuses on archiving and documenting events such as photos, videos and media coverage. Public relations is important in ensuring that graduation events run successfully, that attendees feel informed, and that the university or college gains positive exposure through the event.

The university not only celebrates graduates' academic achievements but also ensures that historic moments such as graduation ceremonies are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical condition or hearing. Inclusivity is a basic principle that must be promoted in all aspects of life, including in higher education. The appearance of a sign language interpreter during the graduation ceremony creates an opportunity for all guests, especially deaf graduates, to feel the momentum in full and totality. Through the theory of diffusion of innovation, which is related to innovation, communication, institutions and time, positive benefits of implementation are found for *deaf interpreters* at the graduation ceremony as follows.

1. Enhanced Accessibility
   One of the main benefits of implementing deaf interpreters in graduation events is increasing accessibility. All attendees, including graduates, guests, and family members who are deaf or *hard of hearing*, can fully experience the messages conveyed during the event. Sign language interpreters enable deaf graduates and guests to understand every word of the spoken word, allowing them to participate fully in the historic moment. This creates an inclusive environment where no one feels marginalized.
2. Recognition of Student Diversity
   Each university has a diverse student population, including students with various needs and backgrounds. Implementing deaf interpreters gives special recognition to the deaf community and *hard-of-hearing students, who are* an important part of the institution. This is a declaration from the university to value diversity and ensure that all members are given the same rights to attend and celebrate their graduate moments.

3. Improving the Quality of Higher Education
   Inclusivity is a core value in higher education. By implementing a *deaf interpreter*, the university not only celebrates graduates' academic achievements but also educates the entire university community about the importance of inclusivity. This important lesson is passed on to students, staff, and faculty, broadening understanding of the varying needs of individuals in the academic environment.
4. Improving the University's Image
   Universities committed to inclusivity and justice will build a more positive image in society. It can be used for long-term investments that influence public perception of institutions. Universities that demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity will become more attractive destinations for prospective students and supporters.
5. Increasing Public Awareness and Education.
   Through the implementation of deaf interpreters, graduation events can also be an opportunity to increase public awareness and understanding of disability issues. This can break stereotypes and prejudices against the deaf community and *hard of hearing* and educate the general public about the importance of inclusivity. Universities not only provide education to their graduates but also to the wider community.
6. Driving Innovation in Inclusivity:
   Implementing *deaf interpreters'* Graduation ceremonies is the first step in encouraging innovation and inclusiveness in the university environment. This creates a precedent for further efforts, including improving accessibility across campus, using the latest technology, and training staff and faculty on diversity and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

Implementing deaf interpreters in university graduation ceremonies represents a positive step toward creating an inclusive and accessible environment by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This innovation not only impacts the experience of deaf or hard-of-hearing graduates but also strengthens the values of inclusivity and equity in higher education public relations.

This research confirms that deaf interpreters can serve as an innovation in public relations inclusivity in higher education institutions. This finding is evidenced by the fact that among Indonesia's top universities, only a select few - including Gadjah Mada University, Brawijaya University, Bandung Institute of Technology, and Padjadjaran University - have implemented deaf interpreters at their graduation ceremonies.

The research serves as a foundation for decision-making at universities that have not yet implemented deaf interpreters, supporting the development of more inclusive education and public relations practices. The study identifies several key benefits of implementation: enhanced accessibility, recognition of student diversity, improved quality of higher education, enhanced university reputation, increased public awareness and education, and promotion of innovation in inclusivity. Universities can implement deaf interpreter innovations in graduation ceremonies to create more inclusive social, educational, cultural, and communication environments.

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