



Reaching deaf and hard-of-hearing people in audiovisual research

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Introduction. In many scientific domains, researchers encounter difficulties in recruiting subjects, respondents, or participants for interviews, surveys, or experiments, particularly when targeting hard-to-reach populations. Selecting appropriate recruitment methods is crucial for ensuring a representative sample, which enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings. Researchers have to consider ways of finding and inviting participants, communicating with them, motivating them to contribute to research, ensuring their anonymity (if necessary) and data security, navigating ethical concerns, considering compensation for participation, and much more. In the audiovisual domain, recruiting deaf and hard-of-hearing participants poses additional challenges due to communication barriers. Difficulties in recruiting such participants could potentially result in the underrepresentation of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in research. *Objectives.* This paper, through a systematic review of existing studies, aims to investigate diverse methods and challenges associated with recruiting deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in audiovisual research. *Methods.* A systematic review was performed following the PRISMA framework to gather information from reliable open access sources ($n = 49$) over the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023. *Results.* The analysis offers insights into the authorship, geographical distribution, participant demographics, and methods used to recruit deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. *Conclusion.* The two most effective recruitment methods for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants include collaboration with the deaf and hard-of-hearing associations and inviting participants through social media. Implementing a well-planned strategy is essential to ensure successful recruitment of participants.

Keywords: deaf and hard-of-hearing, media accessibility, audiovisual translation, participants, recruitment

Introduction

In many fields of scientific research, the inclusion of representative populations is imperative to ensure the validity of results. Selecting appropriate recruitment methods is crucial to ensure a diverse and representative sample. However, it is often a challenging task for researchers to find and recruit subjects for their studies, especially regarding hard-to-reach populations. The deaf and hard-of-hearing population comprises a diverse group of individuals who engage with audiovisual material differently than their hearing counterparts. According to the Canadian Association of the Deaf, the term “Deaf” (written with a capital “D”) denotes deaf individuals who identify with the deaf culture, are actively engaged with the deaf community, and use sign language, while the term “deaf” (written with a small “d”) simply denotes the condition of having hearing loss¹. Usually, the Deaf (written with a capital “D”) are those who were born deaf or experienced hearing loss before acquiring the spoken language; they regard their deafness as part of their identity and culture and use sign language. The deaf (written with a small “d”) are usually considered those who became deafened or hard of hearing after they had acquired the spoken language; they often identify themselves with the hearing community and are more likely to use hearing aids and develop lipreading skills.

Audiovisual translation is a complex form of intersemiotic communication that involves the integration of different communication channels (visual and audio), and audiovisual products have to be seen and heard for the message to be received and understood (Chaume, 2013; Chiaro, 2009; Diaz-Cintas, 2009). As people with hearing impairments cannot receive information through the audio channel, it is important to look at ways to increase the accessibility of the media for this audience. When producing subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, many broadcasters follow “a one-size-fits-all policy” (Aleksandrowicz, 2020, p. 64). However, this method overlooks the fact that the deaf and hard-of-hearing community is not a homogeneous group and fails to address their diverse needs. When researching subtitling or other issues related to media accessibility, it is important to note that no audiovisual solution is suitable for all viewers. Subtitlers working with subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing need to be aware of the profile and needs of the specific addressees and audiences (Neves, 2008). It is necessary to distinguish between different profiles of the deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. One should have in mind that this type of audience is very heterogeneous (Gambier & Di Giovanni, 2018; Szarkowska et al., 2014), comprising of deaf, hard-of-hearing, pre-lingually deaf and post-lingually deaf, oralising deaf, signing deaf, deafened viewers with residual hearing and/or hearing memory (Neves, 2008). Some deaf viewers consider themselves the hearing majority social group, while others consider themselves a linguistic minority. There are those deaf for whom the written text is a second

1 Canadian Association of the Deaf. Retrieved from <https://cad-asc.ca/our-work/terminology/>

language. In certain research, it might also be relevant to consider whether the hearing was lost since birth or later in life and whether the person has hearing aids or cochlear implants. In addition, members of each group may still differ in terms of their age, education, and reading skills.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to provide a systematic review and discuss the strategies, methodologies, and best practices for recruiting deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in audiovisual research. The research objectives are as follows: to identify currently used recruitment methods for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants and to determine the effectiveness of common recruitment strategies for these participants. The research endeavors to make a valuable contribution to the field of audiovisual research by providing methodological guidelines for scholars and researchers in the recruitment of deaf and hard-of-hearing participants, which in turn is anticipated to enhance the overall accessibility of media for viewers with different levels of hearing impairments.

Theoretical background

New information and communication technologies, together with professional translation practices, can enhance the accessibility of audiovisual media offered on the Internet, television, computers, cinemas, theatres, museums, etc., to certain social groups (Diaz-Cintas et al., 2007). By uncovering the preferences and needs of the audience, reception studies can directly influence and improve the quality of subtitling. While audience reception research is on the rise (Gambier, 2016), it is accompanied by a persistent fragmentation of audiences, which calls for a better understanding of audience needs. Accessibility can only be achieved when the needs of all recipients of audiovisual material are taken into account by all those involved in the provision of audiovisual material.

When research design requires the inclusion of human participants for interviews, focus groups, quantitative survey studies and/or experiments, it is important to decide what recruitment methods are best for specific research in order to ensure that the results of research remain valid. Researchers have to deal with various issues such as how to invite the participants, how to communicate with them, how to explain the research design (in layman's terminology), how to motivate them, how to ensure their data safety, what ethical issues may arise, whether there should be any remuneration for their participation, what the financial costs might be, and much more. Some challenges may arise when participants have to travel to the location where the research is carried out, especially when research experiments can be conducted only in specific laboratories, e.g., eye tracking which is often employed in reception studies of audiovisual material. When conducting eye-tracking experiments, it is also important to draw attention to the eye-tracker producers' guidelines, especially taking into account that some data may turn out ambiguous and will have to be eliminated. Another

challenge is recruiting participants with similar characteristics (O'Brien, 2009). For these reasons, the number of participants should be higher than indicated in the research design (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014).

In medical research, "harder-to-reach" or "invisible populations" usually include heterogeneous groups of people who are difficult for researchers to access because of special circumstances, which might lead to their underrepresentation in research (Rockliffe et al., 2018). There is a plethora of research in various fields, including very small numbers of participants, which does not constitute a representative sample of the population.

The recruitment of deaf and hard-of-hearing participants for audiovisual research presents certain challenges stemming from the heterogeneity of this population and accessibility issues related to communication with them, presentation of audiovisual stimuli, availability of sign language interpreters, and so on. Therefore, it is imperative to develop research designs that are inclusive and adapted to the deaf and hard-of-hearing participants.

Recruiting participants via social media has increasingly become popular; however, there is hardly any literature on the implications of this methodology. Researchers use social media platforms to recruit participants and to post links to online surveys. Human participants might have their own biases and influence research results in various ways.

The interest in citizen science has recently been growing across various research fields, as it is highly beneficial for research participants who have the opportunity to learn new things by being involved in it. Citizen science is meant to have a positive impact on society, which enhances the relationship between science and society in general. Volunteer participants often advocate for relevant projects and even become the driving force (Gristwood, 2019). However, researchers are not always aware of the usefulness of citizen science.

Among the strategies that help to overcome challenges of recruiting participants for research, Savard and Kilpatrick (2022) mention that it is necessary to build a relationship of trust with the community of participants (by engaging with the population prior to the research (e.g., volunteering, participating in community activities); engaging key stakeholders in the research process; establishing clear two-way communication between researchers and participants; being transparent and honest; ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and safety of participants), become thoroughly familiar with the target demographic (by doing literature review; having previous research experience; immersing in the study population; engaging key stakeholders in the research process), and adapt recruitment and survey methods to enable those with sensory limitations to participate.

When recruiting participants for research, it is crucial to use an appropriate vocabulary, i.e., the recruitment materials and survey questionnaires have to be

written, with consideration of the level of literacy (Stevens et al., 2017) and the mental and cognitive state of the potential participants.

It should be noted that the value of an individual is of utmost importance when conducting research involving deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Such human-driven or user-centered approaches have been emphasized by a few researchers of audiovisual translation (Greco & Jankowska, 2020; Remael et al., 2016; Romero-Fresco & Eugeni, 2020). In addition, the importance of flexibility and creativity when carrying out research involving harder-to-reach participants is highlighted by scholars with experience in recruiting hard-to-reach audiences (Bonevski et al., 2014; Savard & Kilpatrick, 2022). Moreover, they recommend using several recruitment strategies simultaneously in order to ensure successful recruitment (Bonevski et al., 2014; Getrich et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2018).

Above all, any research should be conducted ethically. Regarding participants, researchers should follow universal laws of not causing harm to the participants in their research. In order to achieve this, researchers must take important steps from the very beginning of the research, such as anticipating potential risks posed to participants and establishing necessary protocols to address them (Mellinger & Baer, 2020). The researchers should be aware of the importance of informed consent, a written document that, in addition to some other information, mainly includes information about the research aim and potential risks and benefits to participants.

Method

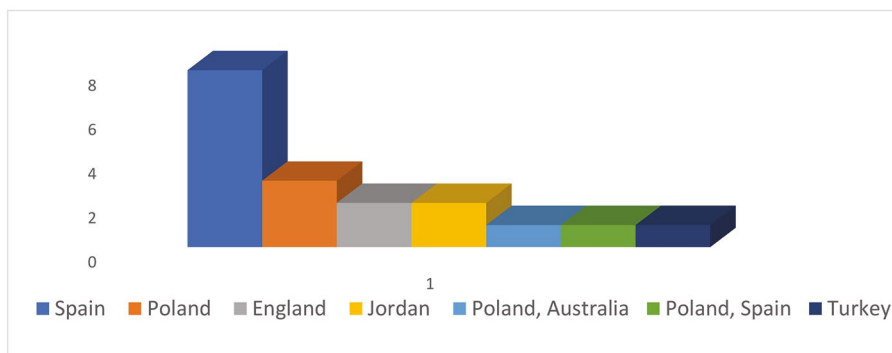
A systematic review was performed following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) framework (Page et al., 2021) to gather information from reliable open-access sources, namely the Scopus database. The preference was given to the Scopus database instead of the Web of Science database as it contains more journals and articles from many reputable publishers (Elsevier, Springer, Taylor and Francis, the Journal of Specialised Translation, the Translator, Perspectives, and many more). Dissertations written on the topic were identified from websites and included in the review. Research articles related to the field of audiovisual translation, specifically subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, were reviewed to answer the research questions of the current study. For collecting relevant articles, a combination of keywords related to subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing was used. Using Boolean operators, search strings were formed using keywords from each relevant area (“subtitle*” AND “deaf”) and were applied to TITLE-ABS-KEY in the SCOPUS database. The data was collected by the author of the current article. The Scopus query was executed on the 3rd of April 2024. The eligibility criteria were as follows: information from titles, abstracts and keywords, research articles written in English and published in journals over the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, excluding

non-relevant subject areas. The initial records identified in the Scopus database ($n = 49$), including authors' names and affiliations, the title of the paper, abstract, keywords, journal name, and year of publication, were exported to an MS Excel spreadsheet for screening. Non-relevant articles and duplicates were removed in the process of screening ($n = 35$). Several articles were rejected because they were not written in English, a few articles were excluded because they investigated the potential usefulness of subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing as a didactic tool for improving listening and writing skills for second language learners, some other research papers were rejected because they only mentioned deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in the literature review, conclusions, or when referring to future research. After removing the non-relevant articles, the records from the Scopus database comprised 14 research papers ($n = 14$). The study also considers five dissertations on subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing written in the last 10 years. After screening the dissertations, two studies were rejected as they were based on research articles. In total, 14 research articles and three dissertations were retrieved for analysis ($n = 17$).

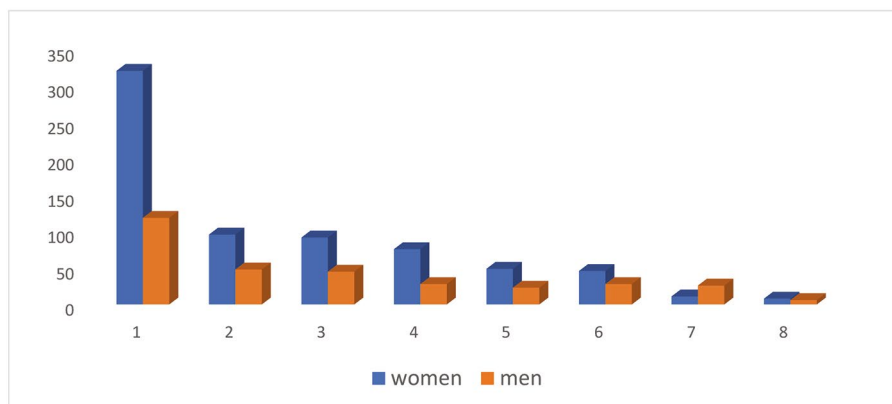
Results

This section explores the key findings derived from systematic analysis of research studies involving deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in audiovisual translation. The analysis offers insights into authorship, geographical distribution, participant demographics, and the methods used to recruit participants.

Authorship and geographical distribution. The analyzed research studies were contributed by a total of 31 authors, among whom Szarkowska emerged as the coauthor of the highest number of articles ($n = 4$), followed by Krejtz ($n = 3$). The examined research articles written by scholars from different countries shed light on the diversity of research contributions from around the world (Fig. 1). Spain stands out as a significant contributor to the global research community of audiovisual translation, with eight articles authored by Spanish researchers. Poland produced three research articles, while England and Jordan each produced two research articles. Collaborative efforts between Poland and Australia and Poland and Spain have resulted in one research article each, which highlights the significance of international partnerships in research projects and allows addressing global challenges.

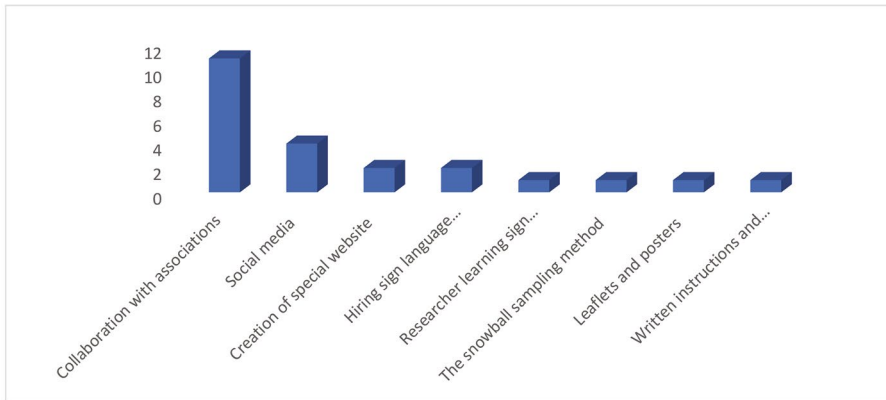
Figure 1*Research articles by country*

Profiles of participants. A total of 1 439 participants were recruited from the analyzed research studies. The average participant count across these studies is 84.7, ranging from 13 to 258 participants in one study. The variance from 13 to 258 participants across the studies is quite wide. In the smallest study, there were only 13 participants, while the largest study had 258 participants. Studies with smaller participant counts might be more susceptible to sampling bias, as a small sample may not be representative of the broader population. Conversely, larger studies may offer more robust insights into the population under investigation. Most studies ($n = 14$) provided additional details about the deaf and hard-of-hearing participants beyond just specifying their number. In the context of gender-specific participant demographics, a total of eight studies provided a distribution of male and female participants (Fig. 2). By this, these studies have contributed to the general understanding of gender composition in audiovisual research. Gender distribution of participants can help researchers understand how different genders engage with audiovisual material and gain insights into potential gender biases. It is noteworthy that in seven out of the eight studies, the number of female participants was higher than that of male participants. This finding suggests that, in these particular contexts, women were more willing to participate or were overrepresented compared to men. The reasons behind this imbalance could vary and might require further investigation. A study conducted in Turkey stood out as an exception, where the number of male participants was higher than that of female participants. This variation might be attributed to cultural, social, or contextual factors specific to that study's location. Analyzing why this divergence occurred can provide valuable insights into the intersection of gender and research participation.

Figure 2*Gender-specific participant demographics*

Additional demographic data. In relation to other demographic data, some studies provided information on the participants' age, their hearing status, the period of life when they lost their hearing, and whether they wore hearing aids or had cochlear implants. Gathering information about the age of study participants is crucial because age can significantly influence various aspects of hearing impairment. For instance, age-related hearing loss is a common condition among older adults, and its characteristics may differ from hearing loss experienced by younger individuals. By recording participants' age, researchers can better understand how hearing impairment manifests across different age groups. Categorizing participants based on their hearing is also fundamental, as it may help researchers distinguish between different needs. Deaf individuals may rely more on subtitles for comprehension, while those who are hard of hearing might have varying degrees of hearing ability. This information helps in designing subtitles that are effective for different levels of hearing impairment. Knowing when participants lost their hearing is significant because the period of life when hearing loss occurs can influence language development. Individuals who lost their hearing early in life may have different language and reading skills compared to those who lost their hearing later in life. Researchers can use this information to adapt subtitle designs accordingly. Finally, information about participants who use hearing aids or have cochlear implants is crucial as it provides information on their access to sound. To conclude, incorporating these demographic variables into studies on subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing ensures that research findings are more applicable to the specific needs of different subgroups within this heterogeneous population.

Methods of recruitment. In the analyzed studies, researchers employed a variety of methods of recruiting deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. In total, eight different approaches can be distinguished (Fig. 3).

Figure 3*Recruitment methods used in the analyzed studies*

The most prevalent method, collaboration with the deaf and hard-of-hearing associations, was mentioned in 11 studies. The second most prevalent method was inviting participants through social media, as mentioned in four studies. Two studies took a more innovative approach by establishing dedicated websites to draw in participants. The websites with information about a particular research study and/or eye-tracking laboratory were created so that interested individuals could learn about the research and express their interest in participating. Recognizing the importance of clear communication and seeking to gain the trust of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, two studies opted to employ sign language interpreters in order to facilitate the inclusion of participants who may have otherwise faced language barriers.

In a research project conducted in Turkey, the researcher decided to learn sign language not only to recruit more participants but also to gain deeper insights into the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The researcher noticed that language barriers and a lack of trust posed significant challenges, as many potential participants were reluctant to engage and remained skeptical of the study's intentions (Gürkan, 2019). By learning the basics of Turkish Sign Language, the researcher was able to communicate more directly with the members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community; during repeated visits to the associations of the deaf and hard-of-hearing, the researcher took the time to explain the benefits of the study for the needs of the hearing-impaired community, gradually gaining participants' trust and overcoming initial reservations (Gürkan, 2019).

Similarly, in her research on the reception of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, Iriarte (2017) highlights the importance of readjusting the researcher's role when the scholar is not part of the same sociocultural community as the participants of the study. She notes that this approach creates

a trusting atmosphere and a safe space where participants feel comfortable enough to contribute more actively to the study (Iriarte, 2017).

Another study embraced the snowball sampling technique to gradually expand its participant pool. This method relies on referrals from existing participants to identify potential new recruits, allowing the study to grow organically. Traditional recruitment methods were not forgotten, as one study utilized the classic approach of distributing leaflets and putting up posters in strategic locations. This method sought to capture the attention of potential participants within specific physical communities.

To conclude, the diversity of recruitment methods underscores the importance of flexibility, creativity, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity. Researchers' job is not only to conduct their studies but also to foster an inclusive and open environment.

Discussion

The current study systematically reviewed ten years of audiovisual research in the period from 2013 to 2023 in relation to the involvement of the deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in studies, surveys, and experiments. In general, it is evident that researchers have to deal with big challenges in recruiting deaf and hard-of-hearing participants and establishing connections with them. In addition to traditional recruitment methods, researchers develop new ideas and solutions. Most of the analyzed researchers emphasize the importance of contacting and establishing links with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The examples of researchers learning sign language are especially noteworthy as they reveal researchers' cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This aligns with previous studies by Webster et al. (2018), Singleton and colleagues (2014, 2015), and Gallegos et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of carrying out research in an ethical manner, building trust between hearing researchers and the deaf and hard-of-hearing participants, and ensuring that participants feel both comfortable and valued throughout the research process. It is also important to note that hiring sign language interpreters to facilitate communication with deaf and hard-of-hearing participants during research experiments might require an additional budget for the research project. Therefore, early planning is essential to assess the available resources.

The data on participant demographics highlights an issue in gender representation. In seven out of eight studies, female participants outnumbered their male counterparts, which may suggest potential biases in participant recruitment or a greater willingness among women to engage with research on media accessibility. This gender imbalance raises questions about the extent to which findings from these studies can be generalized to the broader population. Further investigation into these potential biases is necessary to ensure more representative sampling and improve the robustness of future studies.

This review sheds light on the recruitment challenges and demographic imbalances in audiovisual translation research involving deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Researchers have to refine recruitment strategies, explore digital outreach methods and community-based participatory research, and aim for more diverse geographic and gender representation in their samples.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the reviewed studies demonstrated a diverse range of recruitment strategies for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants, highlighting the significance of flexibility and creativity in the field of audiovisual research. However, due to the heterogeneity of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, it is not feasible to suggest a universal approach for each subgroup. Instead, researchers must adapt their methods to the specific contexts and needs of the populations they aim to involve. The most prevalent method involved collaboration with the deaf and hard-of-hearing associations. The second most prevalent method was inviting participants through social media. Both methods represent an accessible way of reaching potential participants and highlight the role of technology in recruitment efforts. Other less prevalent methods, such as creating dedicated websites to inform and engage potential participants, employing sign language interpreters, or even learning sign language, emphasize the importance of removing language barriers and building rapport with participants. Snowball sampling, relying on referrals from existing participants, was also used to access hard-to-reach populations. Traditional recruitment methods of handing out leaflets and displaying posters in strategic locations demonstrate the importance of offline strategies in certain contexts. To sum up, the variety of recruitment methods observed in the examined studies underscores the necessity of adapting to the unique needs and preferences of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. It is essential for researchers to keep developing innovative and inclusive approaches to ensure meaningful and representative involvement of participants in audiovisual research.

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Obuhvatanje gluvih i nagluvih osoba u audiovizuelnim istraživanjima

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Uvod: U mnogim naučnim oblastima istraživači se susreću sa poteškoćama u regrutovanju ispitanika ili učesnika za intervju, ankete ili eksperimente, posebno kada ciljaju teško dostupne populacije. Izbor odgovarajućih metoda regrutovanja je ključan za obezbeđivanje reprezentativnog uzorka, što poboljšava validnost i pouzdanost nalaza istraživanja. Istraživači moraju razmotriti načine pronalaženja i pozivanja učesnika, komunikacije sa njima, motivisanja da doprinesu istraživanju, osiguravanja njihove anonimnosti (ako je potrebno) i bezbednosti podataka, rešavanja etičkih pitanja, razmatranja nadoknade za učešće i još mnogo toga. U audiovizuelnom domenu regrutovanje gluvih i nagluvih učesnika predstavlja dodatne izazove zbog komunikacijskih barijera. Teškoće u regrutovanju takvih učesnika potencijalno mogu dovesti do nedovoljne zastupljenosti gluvih i nagluvih osoba u istraživanjima. *Cilj:* Ovaj rad, kroz sistematski pregled postojećih studija, ima za cilj da istraži različite metode i izazove povezane sa regrutovanjem gluvih i nagluvih učesnika u audiovizuelnim istraživanjima. *Metode:* Sistematski pregled je sproveden prateći PRISMA okvir radi prikupljanja informacija iz pouzdanih izvora otvorenog pristupa (n = 49) tokom desetogodišnjeg perioda od 2013. do 2023. godine. *Rezultati:* Analiza pruža uvid u autorstvo, geografsku distribuciju, demografske podatke učesnika i metode koje se koriste za regrutovanje gluvih i nagluvih učesnika. *Zaključak:* Dve najefikasnije metode regrutovanja gluvih i nagluvih učesnika uključuju saradnju sa udruženjima gluvih i nagluvih i pozivanje učesnika putem društvenih medija. Sprovođenje dobro isplanirane strategije neophodno je za uspešno regrutovanje učesnika.

Ključne reči: gluvi i nagluvi, pristupačnost medija, audiovizuelni prevod, učesnici, regrutovanje

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