

Inclusive Education and the Plight of the Hearing Impaired In Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study focused on the plight of the hearing impaired in this age of integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools as a response to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994. The Millennium Educational Goals also supported the statement as they advocated for education for all by 2015 regardless of any conditions what so ever. The descriptive survey was used to carry out the investigations as it allows describing what one can see over and beyond the horizon. Interviews, questionnaires and participant observation were used to get in-depth insight of the situation. The study revealed that students with hearing impairment are not yet fully integrated into mainstream schools due to lack of resources that seem to be a barrier to effective inclusion. This has prevented the hearing impaired from realising their dreams and vision of turning away from darkness into light. There has been unfair distribution of resources as well as lack of sensitisation of the concerned communities towards the eradication of the stigma attached to disability and the prejudice and discrimination experienced by disabled people. Instead of taking resources where the children are they are taking children where resources are, at the rehabilitation centres like Jairos Jiri Narran Centre. The challenges faced by all stake holders were revealed and recommendations given to help policy makers map the way forward in order to speed up the inclusion of the hearing impaired into mainstream schools and classrooms.

Keywords: seclusion, mainstreaming, hearing impaired, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Seclusion of the hearing impaired from the mainstream education system has been a cause for concern among humanitarians and educationists. It has been a great threat to humanism as it is against human rights. Humanitarians and educationists are concerned with the safety and quality of learning experiences for students with disabilities in non-inclusive classes (Kaur, 2006). Some hearing impaired learners are still being taught in secluded environments screened from view of or isolated from those without impairments. The right to education is the disable's most threatened right, after the right to life that is (Erazo et al, 1996). In most countries there is either denial of the right to education or violation of rights for the hearing impaired, but in some countries inclusive education has brought the hearing impaired into the mainstream schools and classrooms. However some countries of the world have, in recent years, come to realize that the hearing impaired and others with disabilities deserve equal educational opportunities as educational equality is a fundamental principle of social justice (Terzi, 2008). Educational opportunities in mainstream schools and classes have only recently become widespread in some countries. In some of the countries parents now have a choice between local public schools and residential placements like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru.

In Zimbabwe after independence the Ministry of Education and Culture democratized the education system and guaranteed its citizens universal access to basic education for all school going age children. However no direct mention whatsoever is made of the right of children with disabilities to education. Mpofu (2004) argues that there is no specific legislation for inclusive education in Zimbabwe. What exist are only a series of circulars such as the Education Secretary's Circular Minute No. P 36 of June 1985 which replaced Circular No. P37 of November 1979. It promised assistance in the provision of special needs education by the education Ministry of Zimbabwe.

The Disabled Persons Act of (1996) does not commit the government of Zimbabwe to the provision of social services and special needs education in any way (Peresuh and Barchan 1998). Instead it specifically prevents citizens with difficulties from suing the Zimbabwean government regarding government facility access issues that may impair their community participation (Mpofu, Kasayira et al, 2006). There is no mandatory order stipulating services to be provided for learners with disabilities by whom, where, when and how. The Secretary of Education Policy Circular 36 of 1987 announced that it was an offence for any school to refuse to enrol a child on the grounds of disability and those found

guilty would face disciplinary measures from the District Education Officer.

If denial of the enrolment into any school by learners with hearing impairment and other disabilities is a punishable offense, why then are these learners still being sent to restrictive environments with segregated settings instead of attending local schools nearest to their homes. Why are rehabilitation centres or institutionalization systems that emphasize discrimination of the hearing impaired, like Jairos Jiri Narran Centre in Gweru still being maintained? This makes it an area of concern and prompts the researcher to dig deeper in order to find out what has been done, is being done and is yet to be done in an attempt to implement effective inclusion of the hearing impaired.

Education, formal or informal, can play a primary role in either perpetuating or eliminating prejudice against children with hearing impairment. For Freire (1997:16) "... education becomes a practice for freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." Being impaired does not mean one is uneducable. The hearing impaired need to be educated and be freed from the dependent status to a more independent position as employees and community members who can fully take part in adulthood and the world of work, (Freiberg, 2002). This can only be achieved if they are given equal opportunities in education.

Major developments in the education of the hearing impaired have been made since the 1960s as revealed by Panda (2003). However due to lack of technological development, no hearing aids developments, the internet and increasing human rights discourses in general society, the education for the hearing impaired has continued to be patronising, paternalistic and coercive. Florian and McLaughlin (2008) argue that seclusion of the hearing impaired from mainstream classes reflects the challenges associated with pursuit of equality of opportunity in education. This is shown by the continued existence of separate special needs centres like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru in Zimbabwe. It is the duty of the governments to work towards breaking the barriers that limit the hearing impaired from full participation in their communities and societies in general (Kaur, 2006). However not all countries have managed to totally eradicate seclusion of the hearing impaired from mainstream classes or schools, Zimbabwe included.

Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru is one rehabilitation centre with a residential school. It is a social service institution designed to provide the hearing impaired basic skills needed for them to be

fully functional. It seeks to provide physical, social, academic and societal support for the hearing impaired. When this is done in seclusion like at this centre the humanitarians associate it with rehabilitation which is meant for prisoners not pupils. These centres are usually misused as parents and guardians of children with disabilities dump their children there without any form of support, they view these children as social welfare cases. For them being disabled means being uneducable. This is the kind of ignorance that has influenced continued existence of secluded specialist residential schools.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Inclusive education has become policy in the education sector in most countries of the world. Humanitarians advocated for "education for all", for all school going age children regardless of their abilities. This has seen children with disabilities join mainstream schools and classrooms in most countries. However implementation of this inclusive policy has not been easy for some countries like Zimbabwe. The hearing impaired children are practically still learning in seclusion. Efforts have been made to make the programme a success but the country is still far from achieving success in this area.

LIMITATIONS

There was limited cooperation from the participants especially the hearing impaired learners due to their sensitive nature and beliefs regarding the non-impaired community. The researcher could not use sign language effectively, hence there was a communication barrier with the hearing impaired learners. This, therefore hindered further probing from the researcher to get detailed responses from the hearing impaired learners. Limited time restricted the study to a smaller sample of some Gweru urban schools surrounding Jairos Jiri Naran Centre.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey was used for carrying out the study on the plight of the hearing impaired in this age of inclusive education. Chiromo (2006) supports descriptive surveys saying they allow the researcher to describe what is seen over and beyond the horizon. Data was collected from a sampled analysis unit which was a representative of the studied population. This design is applicable to educational research. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used through questionnaires and interviews conducted with Jairos Jiri principal, special education teachers, hearing impaired learners and heads of mainstream schools surrounding the centre.

The descriptive design enabled the researcher to collect data from a relatively large population of the concerned group using various instruments. Frankel and Wallen (2003) assert that this design allows the

researcher to describe the characteristics of a population after studying a sample. The researcher was able to carry out assessment of attitudes, opinions, conditions and procedures. This made it possible to make predictions of future phenomenon and to use the results to map the way forward for the whole population under study.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This study is influenced by the social democratic perspective on education as well as humanistic ideas that are basic to democratic societies in this century. The social democratic theory suggests that education can actually create equality of opportunity if the system is run properly, (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Social democrats believe that the liberal idea of individuals' development is compatible with the aim of social justice, but in most countries neither is being achieved. According to Terzi (2008) the world has recently come to realize that the hearing impaired and others with different disabilities deserve equal educational opportunities as educational equality is a fundamental principle of social justice. The world has to perceive disability as a socio-cultural developmental phenomenon and see to it that the disabled are accommodated in mainstream schools.

The principle of social equality has contributed much to the inclusion of the hearing impaired and other disabilities into the mainstream education system. In 1993, the United Nations adopted article 6 of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities. This has had much influence on the inclusion process in most countries worldwide. The international law on Human Rights has also provided a basis for inclusive education as education is viewed as an empowerment right which provides the individual with control over his or her course of life. Humanitarians have influenced the signing of many international regional and national documents in support of inclusive education. In 1994 UNESCO signed the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action which also emphasised education for all as it is a basic right which enables one access to the economic and social fabric of society. All these are efforts to place disabled children on the same footing as all other children.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action has contributed much to the provision of educational needs for learners with disabilities and special needs (Ainscow, and Tweddler 1988). At the moment, according to Terzi (2008) different countries have reached different stages in the process of inclusion and in most countries the educational system reflects the ongoing transition from special segregated institutions through integrated settings and towards inclusive schooling. There are wide and pervasive differences characterizing the educational provision for children with hearing impairment and other

special educational needs. In secluded institutions like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre there is a wide gap between progress in developed countries and that in developing or underdeveloped countries like Zimbabwe. The research will establish what humanitarians think about seclusion of learners with disabilities and the world view at present.

Seclusion of the hearing impaired from the mainstream schools and classes defeats the beliefs of the social democrats who feel that everyone's life is worthwhile and educational opportunities should be afforded to all regardless of one's disability (Sacks, 2001). Support services should be brought to the children instead of children going where support services are. This means children with hearing impairment should be given the opportunity to attend local schools near their homes instead of being taken to rehabilitation centres. Inclusive education systems provide students with or without disabilities with access to a wide range of quality teaching which leads to better academic, social and behavior outcomes (Vygotsky, 1995). The educated can access better jobs, income and food security and are likely to experience reduced poverty as well as acquire better housing.

The seclusion of the people with disabilities reflects challenges associated with the pursuit of equality of opportunity in education. Terzi (2008) points out that inclusion should be made a public policy in order to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to educational and employment opportunities and to promote interaction between those with and without disabilities. In some countries like the United States of America, civil rights and legal mandates have played a dominant role in the education of students with disabilities. In Zimbabwe there are still limited services of the inclusion of the hearing impaired, hence the continued seclusion at Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru, which is a breach of human rights and social justice, thus steps should be taken to correct this.

FACTS AND DISCUSSION

The research carried out under different sub-headings revealed quite a lot on the plight of the hearing impaired as we move away from seclusion to inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream schools and classes.

The Hearing Impaired at Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru

The interviews held with the principal of Jairos Jiri Naran Centre revealed that the centre offers primary education ranging from Early Childhood Development (ECD) up to grade seven. The principal explained that the centre follows the same curriculum as the one in mainstream schools. One disturbing factor is that they also write the same examination

though most of them struggle to finish within given time. Inclusive education recommends that all children should be treated equally, hence are given the same national examination. However, Terzi (2008) argues that the curriculum in mainstream schools hinder successful inclusion due to its subject based on inflexible timetabling. In agreement to the above the head of the centre confirmed that the curriculum is not user friendly to children that are profound to severely impaired. Therefore the inclusive policy does not effectively accommodate all the hearing impaired learners.

The study also revealed that there is enough teaching staff at the centre but runs short of non-teaching staff. There is shortage of audiologists and speech therapists that are required to test children's level of impairment and their speech problems when they are enrolled. This has largely affected the enrolment procedure. At the time of the research the centre only had two audiologists instead of the required five and no speech therapist at all. This has impeded the Millennium Development Goals in Education to achieve inclusive education for all by 2015. The aim to meet the learning needs of all the children, youths and adults by 2015 has not been fully realised in Zimbabwe as economic problems are hindering progress.

The shortage of therapists in the country is said to be affecting smooth running of the centre as the government is failing to hire one from outside the country because it has proved to be too expensive. This is one of the challenges which the centre is facing. Other challenges include: old infrastructure since the centre was established in 1968, old assistive devices, lack of audio-technicians to continuously repair the devices, insufficient support materials, financial problems due to delays in receiving government funds and over relying on donor funding and lack of parental or guardian support. Peresuh and Barcham (1998) point out that the government of Zimbabwe is not serious in the provision of sustenance allowance to the people with disabilities as money they are given is just like for all other people. This shows that there is insufficient funding for learners with disabilities which includes the hearing impaired as their resources require more finances than the government can provide.

The Salamanca Frame of Action of which Zimbabwe is a signatory encourages central government to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve its education and enable it to include all children (United Nations, 1994). Jairos Jiri Naran Centre partly depends on the donor community for financial backing. Financial instability is disabling the centre to provide educational opportunities designed to meet the basic needs of the hearing impaired which is its primary obligation. The implementation of

inclusive education is hence thwarted by lack of resources in most centres like Jairos Jiri.

The rehabilitation centres like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre are characterised by advantages and disadvantages as shown on the table overleaf:

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of secluded centres

Advantages	Disadvantages
Creation of comradeship and deaf community	Creation of a deaf culture
Easy communication	Difficulties in interacting with the outside world
Focus on one disability	Gaining of labels that apply a functional loss or lack of worth
Access to concentrated qualified personnel	Having limited or no role models at all
Easy to attain assistance from willing donors	Development of other behavioural problems
Access to relevant resources available at the centre	Parents dumping their children without support

Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru is exclusively for the hearing impaired though there are some staff members who are not impaired. Information shown on the above table reveal that the hearing impaired learners are isolated and the advantages given are the main attractions drawing the hearing impaired to the centre. Residential institutions like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre are discriminating and marginalising people with disabilities through the labelling procedures and segregatory practices based on presumed "abnormality," and devaluing of children with disabilities (Terzi, 2008). Humanitarians under the influence of Christian values are advocating for mainstreaming to replace the system of placing children with disabilities under restrictive educational settings as they are against human rights.

There is need for the government and other stake holders that is, non-governmental organisations, civil society, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies to promote progress towards inclusive education. With the resources directed towards mainstream schools the parents and guardians of children with hearing impairment can now take the children to mainstream schools not to rehabilitation centres.

The Hearing Impaired in Mainstream Schools

The government through its ministries of education has put into place policies and acts meant to promote inclusive education. There was acknowledgement from some headmasters from primary and secondary schools near Jairos Jiri of the existence of a standing policy to support inclusive education. Examples of such attempts given included The Education Secretary's Policy Circular No.P367 of 1990 which stated that all children regardless of race, religion, gender, creed and disability, should have access to basic primary education up to grade seven. There was also The Chief Education Officer's Circular

Minute No. 2 of 1998 which called upon secondary schools to facilitate enrolment of hearing impaired pupils into their schools. In 2004 a Director’s Circular instructed all schools to include learners with disabilities in all competitions including drama, poetry, poster writing, music essay writing and many others.

In Gweru there are three schools that have been selected for the pilot programme by the government meant to promote inclusive education. These are Sandara, Riverside and Bumburwi primary schools. The programme is supported by the government and a non-profitable organisation called Leonard Cheshire Zimbabwe Trust. They also get donations from the European Commission, British Embassy and Anglo American Group to facilitate the effective implementation of the programme. Its aim is to measure attitudes and to conscientise teachers on inclusive education. It is also to make the general public aware of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with disabilities.

The pilot schools have managed to enrol the hearing impaired pupils with mild to moderate impairment into their schools. They are holding sensitisation workshops, acquiring required equipment, resuscitating and building relevant infrastructure in order to accommodate these learners. Other nearby schools do not enrol the hearing impaired learners, but are involved in educating them, especially the mild to moderate who are registered at Jairos Jiri Naran Centre and reside there. This is an integration programme meant to promote inclusive education. For Terzi (2008) integration is a collective noun for

all attempts made to avoid the segregated and isolated education of learners with special educational needs. These learners are receiving inclusion with clinical remediation from qualified special needs teachers at the centre. This has allowed the hearing impaired to learn in the same classrooms with the hearing learners. However, these schools are ill equipped to provide learners with quality education and have to use the centre as a resource centre.

The hearing impaired in mainstream schools in Gweru are largely dependent on Jairos Jiri Naran Centre as they use supportive devices from the centre and are enrolled and budgeted for at the centre. Information from the interviews held with the school heads revealed that, it is the wish of the government that all schools enrol learners with different disabilities, but lack of necessary resources has hindered this. The two nearby High Schools are serviced by one clinical supervisor attending to learners from form one to four. Moore (2000) states that children who are deaf and gifted can perform well when they receive accelerated instruction. It is, however difficult for this specialist teacher to provide accelerated instruction because he is servicing two schools at once. This has affected the performance of the learners; hence shortage of man power is blocking successful inclusion.

Teachers in mainstream schools, taking classes with hearing impaired learners were also given questionnaires and results obtained show that they face quite a number of challenges as shown on the table below:

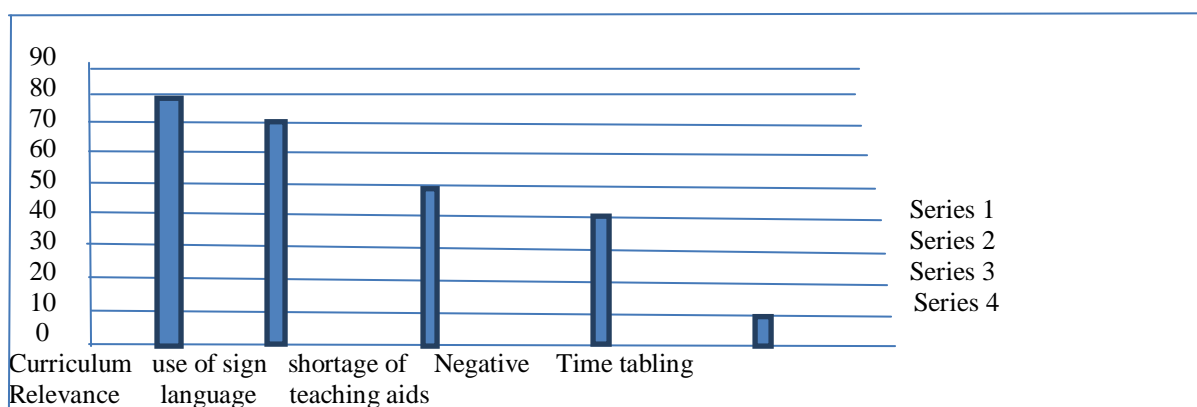


Fig. 1: Challenges faced by teachers in mainstream schools teaching hearing impaired learners

The graph above shows some of the challenges faced by teachers in mainstream schools which are affecting the smooth flow of the integration programme as they have impacted negatively on the hearing impaired learners as well as the hearing learners. Mc Nary et al (2005) noted that teachers in mainstream schools tend to form attitudes and expectations towards students with hearing impairment. This inappropriate perception of people

with disabilities is usually due to lack of conscientisation of the general practitioners and the community at large. There is, therefore need for more public awareness campaigns on the rights of the disabled and benefits of inclusive education.

The issues of curriculum relevance have caused constraints to successful mainstreaming and shortages of qualified personnel to effectively use

sign language has hindered effective communication. The mainstream schools cannot meet the special needs of the hearing impaired children as they are not yet fully equipped for such services. Teachers have a negative attitude as they are not prepared to teach slow achievers due to the results oriented educational system, they are not prepared to accommodate the hearing impaired. The restrictions placed by the inflexible timetabling system also give them limited time to offer quality services. There is therefore need for extended learning time and specific atypical educational resources needed in mainstream schools for effective inclusion to take place.

CONCLUSION

The above facts and discussion show that the hearing impaired have not been left out in the move towards inclusive education, however there is so much yet to be done as revealed by the study. There are a number of challenges faced by restrictive residential centres and the mainstream schools pioneering the inclusive programmes. Although inclusive education is now practiced in developing and developed countries, in Zimbabwe the process is still in progress. Institutions like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre continue to be used as learning centres for the hearing impaired children. Special needs education is being adversely affected by economic challenges faced by the country. Technological advancements that are occurring in hearing aids such as video and movie captions, text telephones, computer assisted instructions and the internet are not yet available in most of our educational institutions; hence the continued utilisation of rehabilitation centres like Jairos Jiri Naran Centre in Gweru.

Children with disabilities, especially the hearing impaired have no choice but to go to restricted learning centres because that is where resources are though in short supply. There is also lack of sensitisation of the general public on the advantages of inclusive education. It has not been easy to eradicate the stigma attached to disability and the prejudice due to lack of awareness campaign programmes on human rights and the rights for all to receive equal opportunities in education. Shortage of man power has hindered early identification of the level of impairment thus making it difficult for the hearing impaired to join school at an early stage. There is also no clear standing policy on the secondary school enrolment of children with disabilities. This has seen many hearing impaired children ending at Jairos Jiri Naran Centre and not proceeding to high school. At the local university, Midlands State University there are students with different disabilities but no hearing impaired students. This shows that the hearing impaired are still restricted to practical subjects for manual trades and end at ordinary level without reaching the advanced level. The curriculum is not user friendly

due to its fixed timetabling system. There is also financial instability due to the government's failure to provide sustenance allowances on time. These are some of the problems affecting implementation of inclusive education for the hearing impaired children in Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After a critical analysis of the findings the following recommendations are made:

- The government should not be erratic in its provision of sustenance allowances and should involve all stake holders as the country is failing to meet the demands due to economic challenges
- There should be acquisition of technologically advanced supportive devices to assist children with profound hearing impairment
- Responsible authorities should ensure fair distribution of human, material and financial resources to enable early identification and intervention in order to pursue equality of opportunities in education. The distributive principles are, 'to distribute goods among persons, not to distribute uses amongst resources.'
- Sensitisation programmes should be spread throughout the country to facilitate conscientisation of parents, teachers, impaired and non-impaired children and the community at large and hence promote interaction among them.
- All teachers' colleges should offer special education training and all universities should offer degrees in special needs education.
- The government and the responsible ministries should come up with a standing policy or a Special Education Act to support abolition of secluded educational settings
- The government should remove the limitations imposed by the curriculum with its subject based structure, a pedagogy based on organising learning through inflexible syllabi and timetabling and the system of accountability based on academic standards.
- There should be involvement of all stakeholders to binding legislation for seclusion of the hearing impaired in education to end.

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