

Challenges faced by Schools when Imparting Prevocational Skills to Learners with Hearing Impairments, The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Harare, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The study analysed the challenges faced by schools when imparting prevocational skills to learners with hearing. The mixed methods design was used. Data was collected from a representative sample of 10 teachers and 30 learners with hearing impairments using questerviews and focus group discussions respectively. The results showed that The major challenges faced included poor communication and language skills, lack of proficiency in sign language, shortage of resource materials to use and the negative attitudes by staff members. For improvement it was suggested that teachers and students all need to learn sign language as it is now one of the official languages in Zimbabwe. There is also need for specialists teachers to act as sign language interpreters when the need arises. In addition students need to be provided with hearing aids to enhance their hearing and improve their participation in class. Lastly it was recommended that the acoustics of classroom settings be improved so as to minimize environmental noises and other sounds that may interfere with the amplification of sounds.

Key Words

Sign Language, Hearing Impairment, Deaf, Prevocational skills, Competency

1.0 Introduction

In Zimbabwe learners with hearing impairment face a lot of challenges when studying academic material because of communication difficulties and also due to the fact that they go to school at a much older age and are not exposed to a lot of learning material early in their lives. The learners need to be equipped with some prevocational skills that they can fall back in the event that they fail to make it academically. People with disabilities have a right to work and careers of their choices and which they are capable of. In recent years there has been a rapid increase in the number of people with hearing impairments who are selling wares in the streets of Harare. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has a right to work, to freely choose their employment and to just and favourable working conditions including pay for equal work without discrimination. However people with hearing impairment are faced with all vices due to lack of exposure to skills required in the work place and lack of knowledge on the importance of pre- vocational skills. It is the obligation of the schools to provide students with hearing impairment career guidance in their choices of careers and equip them with pre- vocational skills for vocational training. When one observes deaf persons in every street corner of the capital city more questions than answers arise. Have these people been to school? If yes what type of curriculum did they go through? And how adequate were the transition service they receive?

According to Hegarty (1988) in Mapepa, Manyowa and Bhebhe (2010) schooling is for all young people and a form of preparation for adult life. Therefore the knowledge and skills acquired at school will help them in making their way into the world of work when they leave school. However for many young people the normal curriculum does not provide sufficient preparation for the world of work let alone independent living. Thus it is equally important that students with hearing impairments should acquire the basic educational skills and also develop vocational interests that will give them a realistic awareness of employment opportunities and help them to achieve personal satisfaction in their future lives. As such this study sought to evaluate the prevocational competence of learners with hearing impairment in the two secondary schools in the northern central district of Harare. This article is a follow up to my previous research where the following research questions were answered:

- (i) What constitute prevocational skills for learners with hearing impairments?
- (ii) How are schools imparting prevocational skills to learners with hearing impairments?

In the current research focus was on the challenges that are being faced when imparting prevocational skills to learners with hearing impairments. Also two research questions underpinned the study.

- (i) What challenges are schools facing in imparting prevocational skills among learners with hearing impairments?
- (ii) What needs to be done to improve the impartation of prevocational skills among learners with hearing impairment?

2.0 Literature Survey

2.1 What Constitute Prevocational Skills?

According to the Wikipedia (2013) vocational education is an education that prepares trainees for jobs at various levels from craft to person in engineering. Pre-vocational skills therefore involve the teaching of these vocational aspects in preparation for further training at a higher level of learning. However, even without going for further training the learners who had been equipped with pre-vocational skills can put them to use and make a living out of them.

Vocational education is usually referred to as technical subjects nowadays. The trainee is directly the expertise in a specific or a group of techniques. Vocational education can be introduced at secondary school level or post- secondary school level as it has diversified over the years and now covers areas such as retail, tourism, information technology, cosmetics as well as the traditional craft industries.

As stated in Mapfumo (2001) craft industries are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic related to a specific trade or occupation or vocation. This therefore offers a wide spectrum of employment opportunities for people with hearing impairments. If they are provided with the pre-vocational training and offered career guidance during the process of learning at school they will be in a better position to choose careers or occupations that appeal to them and to which they are suited considering the nature of their disability.

According to Hutchinson, Atkinson and Orpwood (1998) schools must carry out activities to expose children to a whole range of the spectrum of jobs so as to give them as much opportunities as possible. Thus, schools can do a lot in preparing students for vocational training as well as equipping them with important pre-vocational skills that they can fall back on when they leave formal schooling.

The transition period from school to work is a very crucial stage in the lives of learners with disabilities. This is the ideal time for them to be equipped with the skills that will make them fit into the world of work in a less stressful way.

Many children are affected by hearing impairment but this need not get into their way of learning. These learners are as bright as other children and will rapidly learn if they are given the right opportunities and an enabling environment. According to www.ehow.com (2013) children with hearing impairment have developed coping strategies so they can still lead a relatively functional life. The degree of impairment will definitely change the way in which their life develops. Accurate reading of body language, use of gestures and the ability to lip read are all excellent skills to provide to these children.

In Zimbabwe vocational training in schools include skills in carpentry which are covered in woodwork and wood technology, agriculture, food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics, metal work and computer studies. It is also the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's policy that at secondary school level students should take at least one of these practical subjects. Thus we can see that efforts are being made to equip students with skills that can enhance their employability as well as their entry into vocational colleges. Zimbabwe is an agrarian country and because of that background some young learners with hearing impairment may be able to do work related to agriculture and other placements in urban areas. Also Kwasi (1986) advocates that most countries have agro-based economies, thus it would be logical to consider community level training in agricultural related occupations. Thus in Zimbabwe there are a number of colleges where learners with disability can enroll after secondary education examples, of these colleges include Danhiko, Jairos Jiri Centre, St Giles Emerald Hill and Beatrice vocational centre.

In the United Kingdom the Disability Support Services offers vocational services. According to www.excellencegateway.org (2013) online students are prepared for employment in areas such as building maintenance, cashiering/custom service, office automation, stock and inventory, auto tube specialist, direct care, food service, industrial housekeeping and bookkeeping / clerk training. Thus the goal of each program is to prepare each individual for employment in their chosen field.

In Zimbabwe institutions like the Ruwa National Rehabilitation centre also offers training in areas such as leather work, garment making, type writing, woodwork, bakery and accounting where students with hearing impairment can also enroll to further develop the skills that they would have acquired at secondary school level.

Many children with hearing impairments have academic and cognitive deficiencies due to difficulties in processing language. Therefore such children experience social-emotional functioning difficulties due to communication difficulties. According to the website www.ies.ed.gov (2013)

"A gap exists between the academic achievement of youth with hearing impairment and their peers in the general population."

Students with hearing impairment often experience educational gaps because their disability is invisible and include communication difficulties. However, for those who have mastered the basic communication competence they tend to do well in their school work and exhibit high levels of competence in their prevocational subjects. According www.deafed.net (2013) online

“As students enter higher levels of education they usually encounter material, context and ideas that are increasingly complex, abstract and sophisticated”.

Some students with hearing impairments are able to keep up academically with their peers. However many students with hearing impairment have academic problems as well as personal, social and career development problems.

2.2 Challenges Faced By Schools In Imparting Prevocational Skills To Learners With Hearing Impairments

Learners with hearing impairment face a lot of challenges in the learning process. According to www.brighthub.com (2013) many children with hearing impairment experience educational gaps because their disability is invisible and includes communication difficulties. According to www.teachmag.com (2013) hearing is what keeps us in touch with our world. It plays an important role in expressing and receiving language. Therefore hearing loss creates problems in how an individual express and receives language thus in turn causing social, communication and educational problems.

It is also highlighted on the same website that schools have not extensively addressed environmental noises in the classroom despite research revealing classroom acoustic as a problem. Too many classrooms have been found to be excessively noisy and not appropriate for the learning of a hearing impaired child using amplification. Background noises have been proved to have the greatest effect on the hearing ability of children with mild hearing loss. Therefore teachers need to be aware of their teaching environment and make necessary adaptations if possible. Environmental noises is one of the challenges that schools need to address more seriously because it interferes with support for the hearing impaired and thus affect their learning. (Hall . Oyers and Haas 2011).

Placement in a school also present challenges to the learning ability of learners with hearing impairments. As stated on www.asha.org/publication (2013) appropriate placement is critical to the two main academic challenges that children with hearing impairments face in class, English language development and literacy development. The specific challenges for language development include acquisition of spoken vocabulary and complex syntactic form. The other challenge is literacy development which first entails learning to read and then reading with comprehension. This will have repercussions on their understanding of the theoretical part of the practical subjects and thus influence their competence in the subject area. According to www.asha.org (2013) in order to break the code children must have certain prerequisite skills that include the cognitive ability to process symbols adequately audition to make use of phonetic cues and sufficient language and experience upon which new information can be interpreted. Children who develop a strong vocabulary will have increased access to learning. Furthermore www.lifeonlearning.co.uk (2013) noted that there in the last survey of deaf school leavers done in 1979 it was found that the average reading age for all deaf learners was 8.6 and it has not changed. In inclusive set-ups children with disability may not become well integrated. Thus according to www.hear.it.org (2013) they tend to keep in the background as they avoid standing out from their classmates. Many children will fail to hear or see what the teacher or other pupils are saying. They may never ask other pupils to repeat themselves and some even tell the teacher that no specific microphone is required even though amplification of sound would make it easier for them to hear properly.

Children with hearing impairment want to ‘normal’. They want to be like their friends with normal hearing and they often feel inadequate when drawing attention to their hearing problem. All this has

social consequences for the children. Many of them keep to themselves and prefer not to take part in classroom activities. Compounded to this is the fact that the hearing students may also feel uncomfortable sitting next to someone who cannot talk so in most cases the students are isolated stigmatized and marginalized thus defeating the whole purpose of learning in an inclusive environment. Lastly the other challenge faced by schools in imparting prevocational skills to these learners is the attitude of teachers. Some of the teachers lack confidence in working with students with disabilities. Some have not been exposed to special needs classrooms and therefore lack experience in an inclusive set up. According to Sigaloos and Elkin (1994) these teachers may lack proficiency about modifying the regular curriculum to suit students with individual learning needs. Therefore inadequate knowledge with regards to the instructional techniques and curriculum adaptations will result in difficulties teaching students with hearing impairments.

2.3 Ways To Improve Prevocational Skills Competence Among Learners With Hearing Impairments

Teachers need to be sensitive to the social, academic and emotional challenges faced by learners with H.I. According to <http://teachmag.com> (2013) teachers need to ensure that the child has an optimal hearing and listening environment in the classroom. There should be minimal distance between the teacher and the child to facilitate lip reading. During oral communication the teacher should always face the child and ensure that there is good lighting to reinforce clear sight of visual aids. Environmental noises should be kept to a minimal to keep from interfering with listening devices and teachers should frequently check to see that the hearing aids are working properly. Teachers should bear in mind that children with a hearing aid will use more energy in having to concentrate on sound from the direct sound like the teacher while blocking out environmental noises like humming of lights or air conditioners. Teachers and other students need not exaggerate pronunciation as it will deter understanding. According to www.ferris.edu/html (2013) teachers should keep instructions brief and simple. When repeating instructions, repeat without paraphrasing. Lessons should be presented in a visual format as much as possible, for example chalkboard, overhead, power point slides, hand-outs and teacher demonstrations. Supporting this is <http://teachmag.com> (2013) which states that the use as much visual information as possible to reinforce auditory information provided. Also www.ferris.edu/html (2013) highlighted that use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information.

Also according to <http://teachmag.com> (2013) teachers need to be sensitive to the reality that there is usually more than one visual thing happening at one time like a teacher talking while expecting the student to take notes or observe a procedure in a lesson. Expecting a H.I. student to lip-read and take notes at the same time is not realistic. Thus main notes for the lesson could be provided to student before-hand so that the student could focus on one thing during the delivery of the actual lesson. If possible www.ferris.edu/html (2013) points out that teacher should provide transcripts of audio information. If there is a break in the class the teacher should get the attention of the students who are H.I. before resuming class. It is also important to ensure that the issue of language development is addressed. Thus according to www.asha.org (2013) in order to access language, break the code of reading and acquire comprehension skills assistive technologies that provide access to auditory information is critical. With increased access a child will gain a greater fund of knowledge that will lead to stronger language competence and therefore improve educational outcome. Ask for a volunteer to team up with H.I. in class for assistance. According to www.ferris.edu/html (2013) arrangement offer students who are deaf and hard of hearing the best advantage of seeing all class participants. When desks are arranged in rows keep front seats for students with H.I. and their interpreters. In the U.K. as stated on www.lifelonglearning.co.uk (2013) there was support for the development of CD ROMs and videos for basic skills learning as a supplement and not a replacement for classes.

In Zimbabwe there are a number of vocational training centres that cater for people with disabilities in general. Specifically in mind is the Danhiko project, Ruwa Rehabilitation centre and the various Jairos Jiri Association centres dotted around the country. The Zimbabwe National Association of the Deaf also looks into various issues concerning the deaf. Of interest to note are some of their objectives as reported on www.kubatana.net (2013) which reads, to enable the deaf people to live as far as possible independent lives. Other vocational centres that cater specifically for the H.I. are Jairos Jiri Naran Centre which is a residential school providing primary education and vocational training and the Mzilikazi centre offers two year courses in carpentry/ joinery, clothing technology, secretarial studies among others. There is also the Nzeve Deaf centre which offers courses in gardening, poultry, and fashion and fabrics.

3.0 Methodology

A mixed method design was used. The study specifically focused on two secondary schools that enroll learners with hearing impairments in the Northern Central District. Thus the population of the study included all teachers of practical and technical subjects and students with hearing impairment in the two schools. There were 15 and 120 respectively. Convenient sampling was used to come up with a representative sample of 10 teachers and 30 learners with hearing impairments. Of the ten teachers 4 were Heads of Departments. Questerviews were used to collect data from teachers while focus group discussions were used with the learners.

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Teachers' Qualification in Prevocational Subjects

Teachers	Frequency	Percentage
Prevocational qualification	7	70
Non-qualified	3	30
Total	10	100

Of all the teachers who responded about 2/3 of them were qualified to teach vocational – technical subjects and only 30% are not qualified. Most of the teachers had the qualification to teach the subjects they were teaching showing they were knowledgeable in their respective areas.

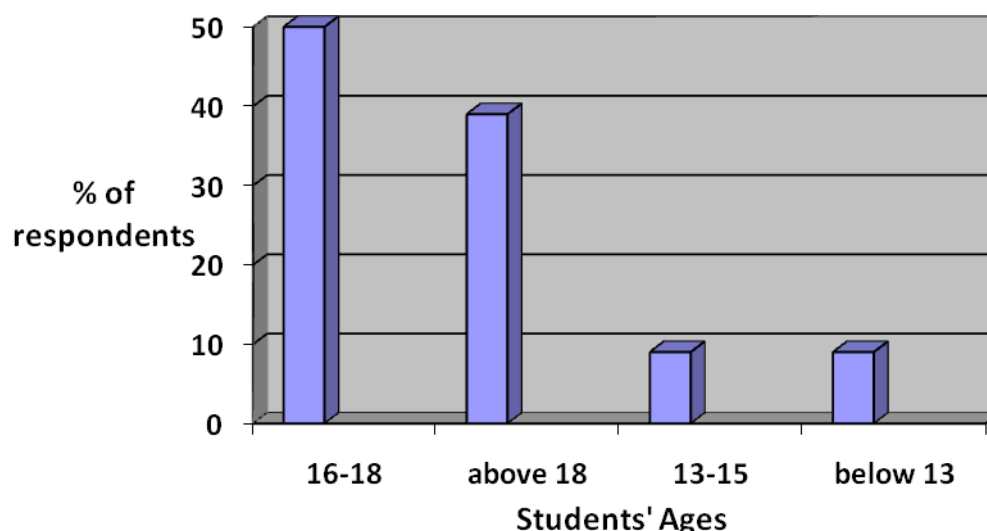
Table 2: Teaching Experience

Years	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10 yrs	5	50
11-20 yrs	2	20
21-30 yrs	2	20
Above 31	1	10
Total	40	100

A majority of the teachers have been teaching for less than 10 years, followed by 11-20 years and 21-30 years respectively while only 10% have over 31 years of experience. Of the H.O.Ds

interviewed they all had been teaching for more than 20 years. Most of the teachers have not yet gained much experience and thus may not be very knowledgeable with regards to exam techniques and skills that may benefit their students. Most of the teachers had diplomas as their highest qualification in vocational training, while 20% had certificates and 20% other qualifications.

Fig 1: Learners' Age Range



On the part of the learners $\frac{1}{2}$ of them are between the ages of 16-18, followed by those above 18, then come those below 13 and 13-15 with 6% respectively. Most of the students were aged between 16 and 18 this is the age where most of them will be leaving school.

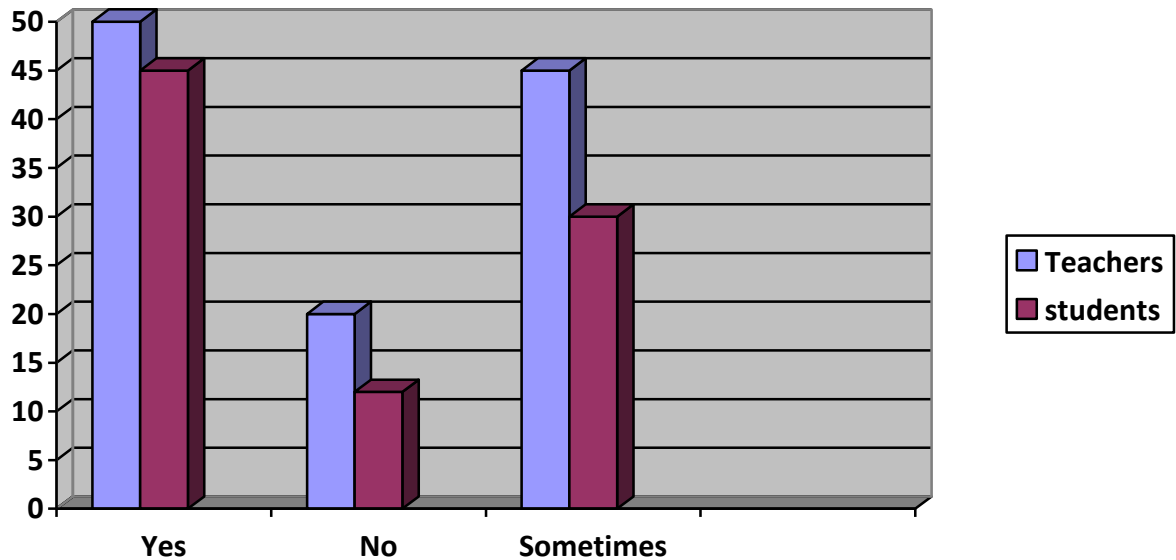
Table 3: Learners' Academic Levels

Years	Frequency	Percentage
Form 1	7	23
Form 2	4	14
Form 3	2	7
Form 4	17	56
Total	30	100

Most of the students were in their final year of secondary education doing form four. Followed by form 1, then form 2, and lastly form 3, 6%. Most of the students were in their final year and were soon going to need the skills as they move to join the labour market.

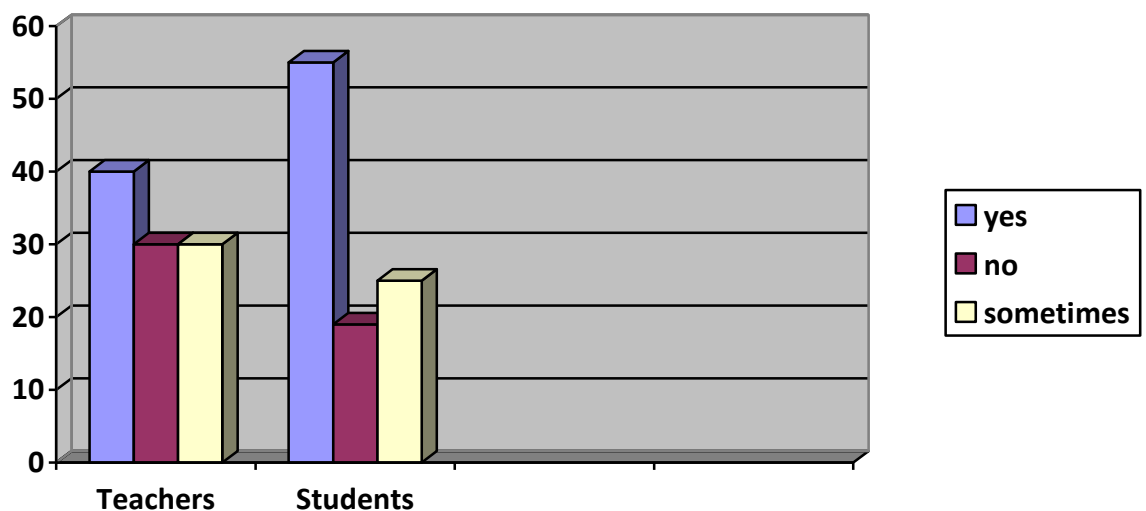
4.2 Challenges Faced By Schools in Imparting Prevocational Skills

Figure 2: Communication Challenges



Half of the teachers said they experienced communication challenges with the learners, 30% sometimes and 20% said they did not have problems. On the side of students 44% said they experienced challenges, 44% sometimes and 12% indicated that they had no challenges. A majority of the respondents on both sides indicated communication challenges as the biggest challenge in the learning and teaching of learners with H.I.

Figure 3: Understanding of Instruction



Most of the teachers said learners experienced difficulties in understanding instructions, 30% sometimes and 30% said they face no difficulties. Most of the students indicated they experience difficulties in understanding instructions from the teachers. Thus 56% said yes, 19% said sometimes they were not clear and 25% said they were easy to follow. Most of the teachers and students agreed that understanding of instructions was a problem. Learners with H.I have language development problems which results in their inability to understand and follow instructions.

Table 4: Participation in Class

Teachers	Frequency	Percentage
Active	5	50
On Average	4	40
Tried their best	1	10
Total	10	100

Half of the teachers indicated students were not active during theory lessons but when it comes to doing practical they were very active. 40% indicated they were on average and 10% said they tried their best. A majority of the teachers noted that participation was high during the practical lessons and low during theory showing that the learners were more comfortable with working on the actual project which did not require reading.

Table 5 Views on communication Challenges

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	5	17
Strongly Agree	24	80
Disagree	1	3
Total	10	100

Students, 80% of them were of the view that teachers were not proficient in sign language and only a few said they did not agree with that. On the other hand 60% of the teachers indicated that they had to write everything on the chalkboard and that learner's comprehension skills were weak. They had limited vocabulary. Most of the teachers were not proficient in sign language indicating that communication with the learners was therefore reduced to a minimal. Therefore writing on the chalkboard most of the time resulted in compounding the work of the teachers that they become stressed at the end of the day.

4.3 Improvements Needed In Imparting Prevocational Skills

All teachers (100%) concurred that there was need for sign language workshops. Also 40% of the teachers feel that students with hearing impairments should be accompanied by the resource room teacher when going for other lessons. In one of the school the H.O.D at Mt Pleasant said they get a lot of support from the special needs teachers who sometimes accompany students for lessons. At Emerald Hill they said they organize workshops for parents to learn sign language so that they could assist children with their school work. The fact that all teachers and students agreed that there should more workshops on sign language just shows that the ability to sign is key to the smooth follow of ideas when it comes to students with H.I. Also interpreters for more lessons were a necessity so that lessons progressed without many disruptions.

Table 6: Use of Support Systems

Number of Students	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	10	33
Strongly Agree	17	57
Disagree	3	10
Total	10	100

Only 10% of the students felt there was no need for the support but 33% agreed and 57% strongly agreed. A majority of the students agreed that support in the form of speech therapy, interpreters, sign language dictionaries and the support from parents and the school would help. Students with H.I. need all the help that they can get so as to improve their language and communication skills to ease the learning process.

Table 7: Support Needed

Support	Frequency	Percentage
Speech therapists	16	53
Sign language interpreters	20	67
Teachers who can sign	30	100
Hearing aids	24	80
Sign language dictionaries	30	100

The entire students indicated that teachers should be able to sign and that dictionaries were needed, 80% would benefit from hearing aids, 67% would need sign language interpreters and 53% would benefit from speech therapists. The H.O.Ds during the interviews indicated they do get support from the government in the form of hearing aids, sign language dictionaries and mirrors as and when they were available. The support was usually in short supply due to shortage of funds.

5.0 Discussion

Teachers and students indicated that they did experienced communication challenges. This brought their total to 88%, so many of the students learning was hindered by communication challenges. The learning process was greatly interfered with as students fail to learn the basic language skills needed in communication. Owing to this 56% of the students said they found instructions from the teachers difficult to follow. On the part of the teachers 50% of them said they faced communication challenges and 30% said sometimes bringing the total to 80%. This really was a matter of concern as this shows that they little communication was taking place between the teachers and students as a majority of them were experiencing problems. Furthermore 40% of the teachers indicated that learners experience difficulties with instructions and another 30% said sometimes. Therefore what this implied was that communication was the number one huddle that was faced by both the teachers and the learners. When this occurred there was bound to be communication breakdown and much valuable time was spent on simple tasks because of communication challenges. Communication is a key element to the teaching and learning of children with H.I. Therefore with communication challenges in place very little learning will take place and much time is spent on a single task trying to make sure that the students understand.

All the teachers and students who responded concurred that teachers need to learn sign language so as to improve on their communication skills. Apart from lack in sign language skills other areas of concern raised in the study included shortage of resources to use in doing the prevocational subjects, shortage of hearing aids for some students, language being too complex for the learners because of their limited vocabulary and skills to tackle language at a higher level and attitude of those in authority and other teachers towards students with hearing impairments. Thus lack of language skills and proficiency in sign language are a great hindrance to the learners with hearing impairments. Furthermore all students and teachers agreed that there was need for all teachers to be taught sign language. They also shared the same sentiments that this together with the help of sign language interpreters in schools, speech therapists, accomplishment by specialist teachers to other subjects and the availability of resources would be used to ease the challenges faced.

6.0 Recommendations

- Students with hearing impairments need exposure to the outside world and should be involved in career guidance. Teachers should make sure that student with hearing impairment attend these workshops when they are held. It is the duty of the school to see to it that they have a teacher in attendance who will act as their interpreter.
- Schools should organize educational tours for them on a more regular basis as these tours will help them learn more about the world of employment. Teachers at departmental level should ensure that at least once a year they organize an educational tour for the benefit of the learners.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to make a follow up on the issue of the school on the workshops programme and make sure that it is revived. Schools need to work in collaboration with industries and revive the school on the workshops programme.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education also need to make it a policy that teachers are trained in sign language and other areas of disabilities when they go for initial teacher training at college. This will ensure that no children are disadvantaged because of the lack of qualified personnel.
- All teachers need to learn sign language hence the need to organize more seminars and workshops on sign language. Thus schools in their clusters should regularly organize these workshops so that all teachers are exposed to sign language.
- The Ministry also need to ensure that there are two resource room teachers at a school so that they can take turns in accompanying students to other lessons and help with communication.
- Also schools need to consider agriculture among the subjects they offer as our country is agrarian and so students can benefit from various sectors that are linked to agriculture.
- The Government must also ensure that more speech therapists are trained so as to overcome the shortage that is currently there and also move towards a situation whereby each school with students with hearing impairments has visiting therapist on a regular basis.
- The Government should embrace fully the technological advancement and diversify the curriculum for computer studies so that they include computerized instructions which are individualized to afford the learners some independence as they would be able to work on their own pace.

- There is also need for more awareness campaigns so as to root out negative attitudes towards people with hearing impairment as this affects their development of self-esteem. This can be done at school level as well as national level through the various ministries that work with children with disabilities.

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