

The Extent to which Transitional Services Prepare Deaf Learners for Community Participation: the Zimbabwean Case

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which transitional services in special schools for the deaf equip the deaf learners with skills that enable them participate in community activities. A mixed methods approach underpinned the study. 30 respondents were purposively drawn from deaf school leavers vending in the streets of Harare, managers of schools enrolling deaf learners and managers of deaf persons organisations. The questionnaire was used to collect data. The researchers used sign language to solicit responses from the deaf participants. In turn the researchers completed the questionnaire on their behalf. The results reveal that Zimbabwe does not have a transitional policy for deaf learners. The results showed that the curricula used in the schools did not have an orientation towards community activities and participation. School managers expressed mixed feelings on whether their services enable deaf learners participate effectively in the community after school. Leaders of deaf organisations revealed that the community and society at large do not understand the deaf culture because there is no interactive language. They highlighted the inability of the society to interact with deaf people which result in their social exclusion. The study recommended that special schools for the deaf must adopt a community based curriculum that will enhance the participation of deaf persons to their communities. It was also recommended that the communities be educated and trained on the communication needs of deaf persons especially sign languages. This can be done by schools, organizations of the deaf and government through the public media.*

Key Words: *Deaf learners, employers, transition services, school management, organizational management*

I. Introduction

Zimbabwe is regarded as one of the African countries that pioneered the enactment of disability laws and policies. To date there are many disability friendly policies and laws that include the Disabled Persons Act (1992, revised 1996) and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013). Zimbabwe is also one of the few African Countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2007). Despite having a lot of good disability laws and policies the provision of education to learners with hearing impairments has been the thorniest issue. The country does not have a uniform for these learners. All the special schools that are providing deaf education seem to follow a curriculum that they deem fit and necessary. One then wonders whether these different curricular are really in line with the needs of the deaf learners, the community and prospective employers. It is against this background that this study was carried to establish the extent to which the transitional services for deaf school leavers really prepare them for community participation.

II. Literature Review

Transition Services and Community Participation by Deaf People

According to Burdine (1993) instructional goals should focus on the requirements of community living, these skills can help people with disabilities to become functional members of the community. Wood (2002) added that the efficacy of any transition program is seen in its ability to make the beneficiaries actively participate in community activities. From these assertions it can be deduced that transitional skills of socialisation and communication are paramount for community participation. As for learners with hearing impairments the issue becomes complicated as soon as the word communication is mentioned due to the complexity of sign language.

A question to be asked here can be who is supposed to develop efficient communication skills between the community and school leavers with hearing impairments? According to Martin and Marshall (1995) transition for the hearing impaired in to the community is hindered by their communication needs. Most people in the community, unless directly or indirectly affected by a disability do not want to learn sign language. As such Martin and Marshall (1995) recommended that the transition process must identify those environments in which the learner will operate and intervention is given only in such environments. Examples given here are the family, extended family intended workplaces and the peer group. Sign language can be taught to those who will

be interacting with the learner in these environments. These authors also argue that the gap is filled by the use of interpreters.

However, research by Hartman (1995) in the United States revealed that the use of interpreters in all the environments limits the interactions of persons who are deaf and their level of community participation is reduced. This was attributed to a lot of factors such as the cost of hiring interpreters, the after-work effect and privacy issues. Against this backdrop Wood (2002) advocated for a curriculum that is community-based. In this approach students may initially learn a skill such as buying food in a school tuck-shop but eventually practice the skill in a community or home setting. This is because the majority of deaf students have difficulty transferring what they have learned in the classroom to the actual setting in which the skill is actually needed. Thereby community environments frequented by the student and his/ her family now and in the future should be the environments used to directly teach (Falvey, 1989). It has to be noted however, that lack of reciprocation by the community in terms of sign language use derails the transition process and perpetuates the deaf culture.

A research carried by Halpern (1994) revealed that a number of school districts in America are reluctant to use a community-based approach due to difficulties in transportation and liability issues when accidents occur, safety of students and lack of parental support. According to a research by Myezwa and M'kumbizi (2003) a lot of attempts are being made for the participation of people with disabilities in the community. In their study of 20 of such programs, hearing impaired people are the least beneficiaries as many people in the communities do not understand the use of sign language. In general Myezwa and M'kumbizi concluded that obstacles such as poor knowledge of CBR, cultural orientation towards disability, expectations of the community and poverty in the communities, especially rural areas greatly militate against the transition of people with disabilities into the community.

Therefore the transition from school to the world of work, post-secondary education, adult life and independent living constitute a major challenge for most hearing impaired students. It involves leaving a relatively supportive special education system, complete with its complimentary services and trained personnel, for the world of adult living and employment, which typically does not provide the same level of services and support, (Danek and McCrone 1990). It involves letting go of the structured role of a student for the multiple and fluid roles of adulthood.

A study by Chauhan (2004) showed that communities are drastically changing positively towards disability. However, the researcher found out that while people with locomotor and visual impairments miss no opportunity to present their own case and seek supportive measures best suited to them, the situation of those with hearing impairments remain that of benefactors rather than of beneficiaries. This is due to the fact that the hearing impaired persons cannot normally express themselves, thereby the hearing persons becomes their accepted leaders and champions. Thus, they do not dream of heading community activities due to their communication limitations. Since they have little or no say in a lot of matters, they remain backward compared to other disabilities (Chauhan, 2004).

Lynch and Lynch (1997) posited that peer involvement plays a great part in the transition of learners with hearing impairments into the community. They are viewed as important part of the socializing environment, particularly peers who are alumni. They can be used as a teaching modeling and enculturation strategy (Carroll and King, 1985). Peers can have an influence of life choices, particularly in situations where parents are communicatively or emotionally unavailable. In addition peers can provide a sense of community and identity, and can contribute to self-esteem and achievement (Lynch and Lynch, 1997).

The research objective for this study was to find the extent to which learners with hearing impairments are prepared for community participation. The strategies used by schools and organisations for the disabled could be explored. These include Community Rehabilitation Progress if any and others. Of particular interest was how these were being implemented versus the intended benefits, thus establishing the relationship. In other words community participation is a great determinant of quality of life and as for those with hearing impairments the current study intended to find out how they square off in this aspect. An attempt also needed to be done to find out the ecological validity of the community focused programs provided in schools and organisations.

III. Methodology

The study used the mixed methods design where both qualitative and quantitative techniques and methods were applied. The sub-research questions were designed in a way that they solicited qualitative responses. However, some questions which were derived from the research questions demanded quantitative presentation and analysis. These were based on the responses gathered from the respondents. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define mixed methods research as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study or set of related studies. Rossman and Wilson (1985) cited by Johnson et al. (2007) identified three reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative research that is to enable confirmation or collaboration of

each other through triangulation, to develop analysis in order to provide richer data and to initiate new modes of thinking by attending to paradoxes that emerge from the two data sources. In this study both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and then analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The study sample was purposively selected and it comprised of 10 school managers selected from schools of the deaf in Harare. It also comprised of 10 managers of deaf persons organisations and 10 deaf persons trading in the streets of Harare. The questionnaire was the data gathering tool used for school managers and managers of deaf organisations. The questionnaires were distributed and collected back within a period of ten days. Structured interviews were used to collect data form the deaf respondents.

IV. Findings

4.1 Biographic Data

(a) Table 1: School Management Biographic Data

Variable	Group	Number	%
Sex	Males	4	40
	Females	6	60
	Total	10	100
Capacity	School Head	2	20
	Deputy Head	2	20
	Senior Teacher/TIC	5	50
	Health Coordinator	1	10
	Total	10	100
Period in same capacity	0 – 5 years	2	20
	6 – 10 years	3	30
	11 – 15 years	1	10
	16 – 20 years	2	20
	20 + years	2	20
	Total	10	100

These results show that the sample had more females than males. 50% of the group were either senior teachers or teachers in charge, while 40% were school heads. One health worker contributed 10% of the total.

(b)Table 2: Demographic characteristics of Organizational Management

Variable	Group	Number	%
Capacity of Interviewee	Disability Officer	1	10
	Communications Officer	2	20
	Finance Officer	2	20
	Director	1	10
	Chairperson	2	20
	Secretary	2	20
	Total	10	100
Experience with organisation	0 – 2 years	4	40
	2 – 4 years	1	10
	5 – 6 years	2	20
	7 – 8 years	1	10
	9 – 10 years	1	10
	11 + years	1	10
	Total	10	100

From table 2 it can be deduced that all the interviewees held very high offices in their organization and thus we well informed. About 40% of these however, had little experience ranging from 0 – 2 years.

4.2 The extent to which transition services prepare learners for community participation.

School managers were asked whether they have a community-based curriculum.

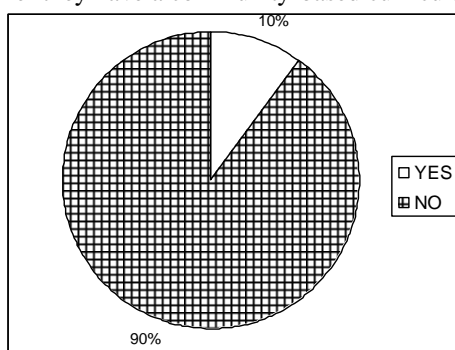


Fig 1: Whether schools have a community-based curriculum

The results show that the two special schools studied did not have a curriculum with a community orientation. The 10% ($\frac{1}{10}$) that said Yes argue that through sports the learners participate in the community.

Cultural acquisition determines ones participation in the community. School managers were asked whether cultural issues specific to individuals were considered as part of transition. All the 10 respondents (100%) answered NO although $\frac{2}{10}$ wrote CHIPAWO as an explanation despite choosing NO.

Lastly the school authorities were asked to evaluate whether transition services for learners with hearing impairments equip them well for community participation.

(N = 10 School Managers)

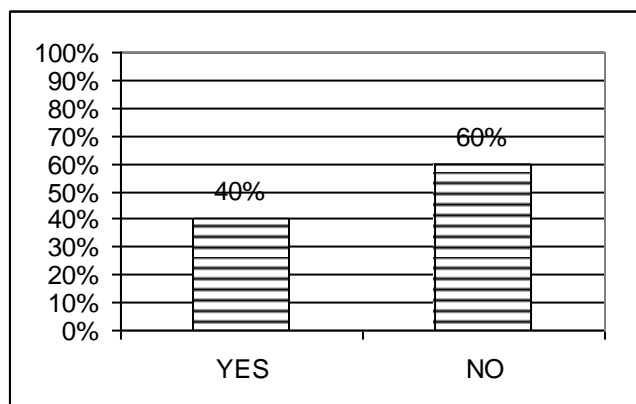


Fig 2: Whether Transitional Services enable community participation

The results in fig 2 above shows that mixed feelings on the level of community participation by school leavers with hearing impairments with 60% saying NO, while 40% said Yes. Below are some of the raw statements responses given:

- Yes because they are trained to have life skills.
- No because the community does not sign
- Yes because their community is the Deaf community
- No, a lot needs to be done to equip them well

Organisational managers were asked whether they were satisfied by the level of community participation by school leavers with hearing impairments. All the 10 respondents answered NO. Some reasons given include:

- Community and society at large do not understand the Deaf culture because there is no interactive language.
- Not at all, the inability of the society to interact with them result in their social exclusion.
- No. They are being let down due to stereotyping

Deaf persons in the streets were asked the type of activities they are involved in, in the larger community.

Table 3: Deaf Persons' Community Activities

Activity	Frequency	%
Church	1	10
Sports	2	20
None	7	70
Total	10	100

The results show that Deaf persons' barely participate in the activities of the wider community. At church as indicated by 10%, they are not directly involved but in fact act as mainly passive recipients.

V. Discussion

Transition Services and Community Participation

Research results have shown that

- 90% of the school managers agreed that they do not have a curriculum which is community oriented.
- 100% of Deaf persons do not participate in any meaningful community activity except sports and church
- Cultural differences are not an important of school curriculum.
- Representatives of organizations 100% said deaf persons are not given their space in the community.

These results generally show that persons with hearing impairment are not being recognized by the community as effective members. One of the topical issues in the field of disability is inclusion which cascades

from the school to the community. The failure to include people with hearing impairments by the society can be attributed to the continued existence of special schools as in the case of those under study.

Many researches such as the one by Wood (2002) indicate that special schools limit interaction between the deaf person and society. This limited interaction goes further to other areas such as employment. However, special schools are the least restrictive environment for learners with hearing impairments. The need for their recognition by society as well as their participation is a human rights issue. The researchers have observed a certain scenario in Zimbabwe. It seems able bodied persons are expected to learn, work and contribute to their families and communities. As for people with disabilities we seem to derive much satisfaction when they fend for themselves outside the community. It seems when a society fail to recognize them in such a sphere they feel quite marginalized. There is need for society to involve them and expect them to help their communities. According to Burdine (1993) institutional goals should focus on the requirements of the community, such skills can help deaf persons to become functional society members. While Halpern (1994) revealed that a community based approach is expensive due to transport and liability issues it is imperative for special schools to craft such an approach at lower level when resources permit. The frequented environments should be those the child and his /her family found themselves in now and in the future (Falvey, 1989).

Recommendations

- Special schools for the deaf must adopt a community based curriculum that will enhance the participation of deaf persons to their communities.
- The communities be educated and trained on the communication needs of deaf persons especially sign languages. This can be done by schools, organizations of the deaf and government through the public media.
- That community leaders be conscientised on the need to recognize deaf people in community activities.
- That a quota system be introduced where people with disabilities constitute a certain percentage within community activities especially leadership positions.

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