

Inclusion of Deaf Students in Mainstream Rural Primary Schools in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities

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KEYWORDS Inclusion. Sign Language Interpretation. Deaf. Mainstream Primary School. Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT The study sought to find out the challenges and opportunities of including deaf students in secular and missionary mainstream primary schools in a rural area in Zimbabwe. Twenty- seven participants (2 school heads, 2 specialist teachers, 8 mainstream teachers and 15 deaf students) were purposively selected. All participants were interviewed individually and lesson observations were carried out by one of the researchers. Theme identification methods were used to analyse data and it was found that there were more similarities than differences in the way secular and missionary mainstream schools tried to include the deaf students. All the deaf students had hearing aids and were mostly taught by regular class teachers in the mainstream but with constant withdrawal to the resource rooms for specialised services such as auditory training. Despite wearing hearing aids most deaf students could not hear the spoken languages used by teachers. All mainstream teachers were not conversant with Sign Language. There was occasional Sign Language 'interpretation' in the mainstream classes whenever the specialist teachers were available. Sign Language interpreters were unable to sign many abstract concepts and used spoken language grammar in the 'interpretations'. Deaf students participated in most out-of-class activities with hearing peers. It was concluded that the deaf students were socially included but were academically excluded because of lack of linguistic access to the academic curriculum in the primary schools. Recommendations were made.