

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

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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.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, children with disabilities were believed to be inferior to non-disabled peers that it was deemed essential to teach them in separate special schools where they would not only receive specialist services but also avoid disturbing the learning of others (Green and Engelbrecht 2007). These authors observed that 'special education' developed as a system parallel to mainstream education and conceptualized those with disabilities as 'abnormal' and in need of the attention of specialists. As the frontiers of ignorance gradually receded, it was realised that it might not be in the best interests of those with disabilities or even society, for them to be separated from the mainstream. There was a paradigm shift to what Mpofu et al. (2007) call the expression and promotion of egalitarian societal values of equal opportunity and access to the resources necessary for the acquisition of abilities and skills that enable meaning-

ful societal participation by individuals in their communities. UNESCO (1994) marked this turning point to inclusive education as the celebration of differences and the support for all learners. Focus had shifted from the individual's shortcomings and how they could be overcome to focusing on how the shortcomings of ordinary schools could be overcome to accommodate all learners. Support was now thought to be possible as there was the perception of children with disabilities as only having special educational needs which needed to be accommodated in least restrictive environments. This therefore paved the way for the education of children with disabilities together with non-disabled peers in ordinary schools rather than in the specialized institutions which had been founded by missionaries on charitable ethos.

Like other groups of children with special educational needs, deaf children in Zimbabwe began to be educated together with hearing children in this new dispensation. The global egalitarian foundations of education which were laid in such conventions as Education for All (1990) and UNESCO (1994) found expression in Zimbabwean legislation such as the Education Act (1996) which institutionalised the right of every Zimbabwean child to school education at

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the nearest school. Mpofu et al. (2007) observed that inclusive education was one of several ways in which the Zimbabwean education authorities sought to enhance citizen rights for people with disabilities. Emphasis was on universalizing access and promoting equity for disadvantaged groups with special attention on removing educational disparities. Green and Engelbrecht (2007) say that in inclusive education, the emphasis is on provision, within the mainstream school environment, of the conditions and support that will enable diverse individuals to achieve certain specified educational outcomes which may, or may not be understood to be the same for all learners. Chakuchichi et al. (2003) view inclusion as fostering an even learning environment for all children in their beliefs, values and norms. Thus, inclusion may be viewed as a tool for cultivating cultural and social values in hearing children and their deaf peers.

The foregoing seems to suggest the meeting of diverse needs and accommodation of all students in the nearest regular schools. Powers (1996) points out that deaf students have the right to learn in an inclusive setting, alongside their hearing peers. Teaching deaf and hearing children together in ordinary schools was now thought to give deaf learners equal access to opportunities for learning and normal models in society. However, the UNESCO (1994), convention which gave a voice to the need to include children with disabilities in ordinary schools, highlights that deaf learners may need to use Sign Language as medium of communication. But this appears to be hampered in ordinary schools as shown by Kiyaga and Moores's (2009:149) report that teachers of deaf children in sub-Saharan Africa in general cannot sign and do not view Sign Language as a complete language. This may not come as a surprise in light of Zimbabwe's indigenous-traditionalist culture which largely views disability negatively and in which many people experience shame and blame if there is a person with a disability in their family (Chidyausiku 2000; Mpofu et al. 2007). Devlieger (1998) found that the terms used to describe people with disabilities in the main languages Shona and Ndebele (*chirema*: Shona and *isilema*: Ndebele) use the prefix for 'it' which indicates that people with a disability are perceived as having a thing-like quality which sets them apart from full humans. The

morphemes '-rema' and '-lema' mean being heavy, failing or lacking competence. Ladd (2003) says negative attitudes towards people with disabilities originate in the medical model belief that they are not full human beings because of the absence of or damage to physical faculty which in effect is a form of blaming the victim. Viewing people with disabilities as learners simply having different needs which simply have to be accommodated in a regular school becomes questionable given this cultural background.

In Zimbabwe, deaf people are referred to as *mbeveve* in chiShona, or *imbebebe* in isiNdebele both of which mean mute. Both terms have concordial agreement with pronouns for non-humans. In the official school system deafness is referred to as 'hearing impairment' which covers the whole range from mild to profound impairment and the Education Management Information Systems (2004) recorded 1 634 children with hearing impairment as attending school in Zimbabwe. This impairment view of deafness is based on the international classification of disabilities by WHO (1991) which suggests a deficiency perspective that could result in a medical or charity model. It is not clear whether using African indigenous terms which have concordial agreement with non-humans or employing an official term based on a deficiency perspective would allow the perception of deaf learners as having different needs which simply have to be accommodated in a regular school. Viljoen et al. (1988) found an unusually high prevalence of autosomal recessively inherited deafness among the Shona who according to Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika (2007) constitute more than 80% of the Zimbabwean population. Although Viljoen et al.'s (1988) finding is surprising in an ethnic group which discourages consanguinity, the number of deaf children in school is significant and so investigation of the opportunities that these learners are afforded by being accommodated in mainstream schools appears to be warranted.

This study uses the term 'deafness' in place of 'hearing impairment' to reflect a cultural rather than a deficiency perspective. In addition, referring to 'hearing impairment' in a country where the assessments are uncertain because of lack of trained audiologists may appear to minimize this invisible disability which can easily be overlooked or mistakenly consid-

ered as mental retardation. The devastating effects of deafness, whether it is mild or profound, are well recorded in the literature which shows how most deaf high school leavers barely manage a fourth grade reading level (Wood et al. 1996; Brueggemann 2004; Wauters et al. 2006). In this light, it becomes imperative to explore the challenges faced by including deaf learners in schools.

The challenge is whether ordinary primary schools in rural areas, whether church-related or secular, are the least restrictive environment for deaf learners or not. School environments which offer deaf pupils opportunities to participate as fully as possible might arguably be considered less restrictive. UNESCO (1994) argues that because there is need for deaf students to use Sign Language as medium of communication, they may be more suitably provided for, and by implication, inclusively taught in special institutions. No wonder that UNESCO (2003) notes that very few ordinary schools practice inclusive education in Zimbabwe which implies that very few of them have deaf students. It therefore becomes very important to find out the challenges faced by the few rural primary schools that include deaf students in Zimbabwe.

Goals of the Study

The study intended to address the following specific research questions:

- What challenges are faced by ordinary rural primary schools in including deaf learners?
- What opportunities for inclusive education are offered to deaf learners in ordinary rural primary schools?

METHOD

Design

This was a case study designed to analyze how two ordinary rural primary schools in the same district included deaf pupils. The researchers took the two schools to be Henning's (2004) bounded systems united by having deaf learners enrolled together with hearing learners. Since the researchers were interested in themes revolving around the challenges and opportunities situated in the systems, they used qualitative methods to facilitate not only collection of

data as whole entities (Henning 2004) but also the richness of the problematic relationships (Stake 2002).

Sample

The sample for this study comprised all the 15 deaf students (3 grade 4, 5 grade 5, 4 grade 6 and 3 grade 7) from two purposefully sampled rural ordinary schools, 8 mainstream teachers (3 males, 5 females) into whose classes the deaf pupils were included, both school-heads and both specialist teachers manning the resource units for the deaf at the two primary schools. At each school, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Teacher participants were selected on the assumption that they were aware of the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education while deaf learners were selected to represent their own views on inclusion challenges and opportunities in the school systems.

Instruments

Interviews and lesson observations were employed. The interviews for school-heads were meant to ascertain whether the heads thought they were adequately equipped in terms of human and material resources to fully support the inclusive education of deaf students. The teachers' interviews were designed to get information on teachers' professional opinions and perceptions on the challenges of including deaf students in the regular classrooms. The deaf pupils' focus group interviews sought to understand the extent to which they participated in class and in out-of-class activities. To aid in the collection of data from teachers and pupils, observation of lessons was employed. Lesson observation helped to show whether or not the teachers' 'accounts' were coherent with the 'practice' as observed. Two teachers from each of the two schools were observed in formal 30 minute lessons while interacting with their classes which included at least one deaf pupil.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission to collect data from the schools was sought and obtained from the government through the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture before an appointment was made

with each school-head. At each school, the school-head was interviewed then the specialist teacher and the mainstream teachers. Two lessons were then observed at each school before focus group interviews were conducted with the deaf students at each of the schools

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using theme identification methods. Themes are umbrella constructs which are can be identified before, during and after data collection (Welman et al. 2005). This means that data analysis and data collection were done simultaneously as advocated by Marshall and Rossman (1989) in Creswell (2009). After reading through all the data to get a general sense of the information and reflecting on its overall meaning, detailed analysis involving coding was done. Theme identification entailed comparing and contrasting material. This method allowed the researchers to examine the teachers', school-heads' and deaf pupils' points of views.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting the case study in order to maintain the integrity of the institutions concerned. Informed consent was then sought and given by the parents, school-head, teachers and students. In addition to the consent given on behalf of the students by teachers acting *in loco-parentis*, students themselves consented and their parents freely agreed to let them participate in the study. Participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were promised access to the final research results.

RESULTS

In interviews with school heads, some materials were said to be in short supply and others were adequate. Mirrors that were said to be needed in the teaching of speech were cited as material resources that were in short supply. Hearing aids were said to be enough as every one of the deaf pupils had received a donated hearing aid. The school heads were also satisfied that each of their schools had a specialist teacher for the deaf who was responsible for the

resource room. Both school-heads said that they were aware that all of their mainstream staff was not competent in Sign Language. Both indicated that the two specialist teachers carried out staff development courses for all teachers and had regular class visits to classes where deaf children were being taught. Responding to the teachers' concern that they did not have Sign Language dictionaries, both school-heads said that they had already made so many reports about the issue to the district offices and that they were still awaiting delivery of the dictionaries.

All the non-specialist teachers concurred that they were incompetent in Sign Language. One teacher said "*I attend the many Sign Language courses conducted by the specialist teacher but then I quickly forget many signs I would have learnt.*" Both specialist teachers said that they were fluent with the Zimbabwe Sign Language alphabet, number system and everyday signs for communication. One said, "*I sign in order for my pupils to understand what would have been taught in the ordinary class. It is not easy but sometimes they do understand.*" Another one said, "*I think with more training in Sign Language I would be better able to assist the deaf children more often than I do now.*"

Both specialist teachers were dissatisfied with the material resources that were available as they said that they were not conducive to learning. One said, "*The hearing aids that these pupils have are now so old that they distort sounds. We need new hearing aids if these children are to benefit from the talking that goes on in ordinary classes.*" The other specialist teacher said, "*The children tend to want to switch off their hearing aids and so I tell the teachers to be on the lookout for this kind of misbehavior.*" He added that, "*I think the big body-worn hearing aids that they have are too bulky and therefore stigmatising which is why they do not want them.*" The specialist teacher said, "*I have made observations during class visits. Some teachers simply ignore these deaf children in class and just give them written exercises. They really leave all the teaching to be done by me in the resource room.*"

Most mainstream teachers concurred that they rarely attend to individual differences. Some of them mentioned the time-table as restricting them from paying attention to individual problems. One teacher said, "*Time in one lesson is*

not enough to attend to each child individually." Others mentioned large class sizes as affecting their ability to pay attention to individual deaf learners. One said, *"The classes that we teach here are too big to allow me to really give attention to one particular child. I think for individual attention they are better off in the resource room where they are fewer and have the services of a trained specialist."*

Most mainstream teachers said that once they provided deaf pupils with hearing aids they then proceeded to teach them with the rest of the hearing class. One teacher said, *"I am not exactly sure how much they pick up in these lessons but some of them do answer questions correctly afterwards. However most of the time it appears there are quite a lot of misunderstandings."* On availability of resources, most of the mainstream teachers indicated that they were satisfied that every deaf pupil had a hearing aid. Most mainstream teachers acknowledged that teaching deaf children was difficult for them. Some said they were not conversant with appropriate skills and language for use. One said, *"I am not a specialist so I cannot do many of the extra things that a specialist would in order to help these children."*

Most mainstream teachers and both heads felt that the included students were not benefiting as much as they should. Both school-heads indicated that deaf students mix freely with hearing students in the mainstream classes. They however pointed out that the deaf pupils did not perform as well as the hearing students academically. It emerged that in the end-of-term academic ranking of students, those who were deaf were consistently at the bottom of their classes. All the mainstream teachers said that the current syllabi did not fully address the needs of deaf students. Most of the teachers said that they would be happier if deaf students were taught by specialist teachers in self-contained classes where they were sure they would benefit a lot more. One of them said, *"These students would be better off in the resource room where the specialist teacher would have more time to impart the necessary skills. As it is, I am not really sure how to handle two deaf students in my class with 44 other hearing students."*

In the student interviews, most deaf students concurred with the specialist teachers that available hearing aids were inefficient. One deaf student said, *"My hearing aid is faulty so I keep it*

switched off." Another said, *"The battery is flat so I do not use it."* Another said, *"There is too much noise in the classroom, so I cannot really use it there. But outside, it helps me a lot."*

All the deaf students said that they had communication problems in the ordinary classes where they were supposed to learn. They all singled out communication as a problem as they could not speak orally while hearing students and teachers had problems in signing. Some deaf students indicated that hearing students were eager to learn to sign and were very helpful to them in class. One of them said, *"I have taught my friends some signs which they use to tell me what will be happening in class."* To ease communication problems all the deaf students indicated that a specialist teacher for the deaf signed for them when communication problems arose. However the specialist teacher was not readily available. A student said, *"The specialist teacher who can sign may be in another class so I need to make use of the other pupils in order to understand the lesson."* Another said, *"I learn more from my teacher in the resource room because he signs most of the time."* All the pupils said that they benefitted from the specialist teacher's interpretation for them in the resource room. No students thought that the teachers' speaking more loudly eased their communication problems. None of the deaf students viewed ordinary classes as good for them, citing communication problems as the main hindrance to learning. All of them indicated that they were better off in the schools' resource room with the specialist teacher.

All deaf students indicated that they had many friends. All of them listed not less than three hearing and deaf friends. This concurred with most teachers who indicated that deaf students play and work with others in the ordinary schools without problems. In one school, one of the deaf students in the seventh grade was said to be an accomplished actor in school plays. Deaf children were said to be benefiting from social and sporting activities such as netball, volleyball, athletics and soccer which they were doing with hearing peers. However, none of the deaf pupils had any leadership roles in the schools.

All the non specialist teachers said that the specialist skills of teaching deaf children were difficult for them as they were not specialists and so did not know how to train the children

to listen, lip-read or sign. One teacher said, *"I am taught many skills by the specialist teacher during staff development courses and consultation time but I quickly forget the Sign Language alphabet and signs."* They also complained that they did not have the Sign Language dictionaries and Sign Language alphabet for daily reference. Teachers indicated that they needed the Zimbabwe Sign Language dictionaries for use on a daily basis. All teachers said deaf children spend most of their learning time doing something educational. One teacher said, *"I tend to use group-work and pair-work as strategies to ensure that all my pupils participate. Teaching the whole class at once tends to leave out those who are vulnerable such as the deaf."* In explaining what they did more often now that they had deaf learners in class, most teachers said that they used visual and tactile aids more often than before. One teacher said, *"I tend to have more pictures and other charts in my lessons because I have been told that these deaf pupils are visual learners. So I write a lot on manila to enable them to have something to refer to during and after the lesson."*

Lesson observations corroborated many of the issues that the teachers were bringing up. What was prevalent in all four lessons observed was the oral-aural approach using lecture and chalk and talk methods. Deaf children were made to sit in front where they could have a good view of the teacher and chalkboard. Observations on the two teachers who did not have an interpreter did not show any participation by the deaf children in the oral lesson. During the observations, no deaf child initiated a dialogue with any of the mainstream teachers. In the two lessons where the specialist teacher interpreted the lessons for the deaf pupils, the deaf pupils interacted regularly with the specialist throughout the lesson. They nodded their heads constantly and repeated some of the things that the interpreter was signing to them. In both lessons the signing seemed to be much faster than the speaking so that there were various pauses to enable the speaking teacher to catch up. No teaching and learning media or gadgets were used in any of the observed lessons besides chalk and the chalkboard.

DISCUSSION

Shortage of material resources and inadequacy of human resources featured prominently

in both the interviews and the lesson observations. Serpell (1999) notes that the inclusive education of children with disabilities is hampered by a lack of resources needed to meet the individualised needs of such children. Earlier inclusive education studies in Zimbabwe, for example, Chireshe (2011) revealed the lack of resources as a major setback to inclusive education. The unavailability of mirrors needed for the teaching of speech and the availability of hearing aids would appear to be indicative of the intention to use the oral-aural approach of teaching deaf pupils. Lesson observations also corroborated this oral-aural intention. Such a focus on trying to teach deaf children to listen to spoken language appears to go against UNESCO's (1994) focus of trying to overcome the shortcomings of ordinary schools to accommodate all learners. It appears the schools' focus is on the individual deaf learners' shortcomings and how to overcome them. So, even if the deaf pupils are in mainstream primary schools, they are still conceptualised as 'abnormal' or 'inferior' and therefore needing to be brought up to the level of 'normal' or 'superior' hearing peers who can use a spoken language to learn. Even in this deficiency-driven approach to catering for the deaf pupils, the schools' failure to procure inexpensive mirrors and the availability of the relatively more expensive, but donor-funded hearing aids might tell another story. It appears to be indicative of a dependence on donors which drives the schools' deficit model of inclusive education. Such donor-driven approaches may show that schools lack full commitment to inclusion as they are unwilling to use any of their financial resources to further such causes.

The donor-funded hearing aids which are said by the school-heads and mainstream teachers to be available are condemned as inefficient by the more knowledgeable specialists and more so by most of the deaf pupils who are consumers of the service. Commitment to an oral-aural approach of trying to include deaf pupils into hearing classes and ultimately hearing society then becomes doubtful in circumstances where availability of materials is not only donor-driven but also results in the use of outdated, inefficient equipment. Johnstone (2007) argues that while it is true that many great teachers can and do implement inclusive education with little in terms of learning materials, it is likely that an

increase in material availability, coupled with education on material usage, would increase implementation efforts toward inclusive education. As noted by Zimba et al. (2004) and Naanda (2005) in their Namibian studies, the implementation of an effective inclusive education programme is hampered by a shortage of human and material resources. UNESCO (1994) as the founding document on which inclusive education is based, is clear that support is an important factor for successful inclusion.

Choice of oral approaches to try to include deaf pupils might be explained by the mainstream staff's acknowledged incompetency in Sign Language. Approaches involving speaking and listening obviate the teachers' need to know Sign Language. No wonder that most mainstream teachers provided the deaf pupils with hearing aids and proceeded to teach them as 'though they were hearing'. Musengi (1999) found that teachers whose deaf pupils were provided with hearing aids tended to take it for granted that the pupils could now hear them and so they used teaching approaches that involved talking and listening. Teachers who used written language on charts on the premise that these pupils were visualizers may not fully understand the theoretical underpinnings of bilingual education. Mayer and Akamatsu (1999) explain that following from Cummins (1991) linguistic interdependence model, deaf children need a solid foundation in a local Sign Language to buttress their learning of the majority language in its written form without exposure to the majority language's spoken system. In this case, these deaf learners who are in the mainstream cannot be presumed to have a solid mastery of a native Sign Language as they typically lack native Sign Language models both at home and at school. There is therefore very little chance that the deaf pupils were able to successfully refer to the written language during or after the lesson. The teachers' own admission that their deaf pupils are not learning much from spoken language and would benefit from Sign Language seems like a cry to implement Sign Language programs in the schools in order to include this group of pupils in learning activities. Such an approach would constitute the celebration of differences that UNESCO (1994) says are characteristic of inclusive education. This would enable the special educational needs of deaf children to be accommodated in

the least restrictive environment. In Green and Engelbrecht's (2007) conceptualization, the deaf learners would then not be viewed as abnormal but as merely having special educational needs which had to be celebrated and accommodated in ordinary schools.

The idea of celebrating differences by accommodating the special educational needs of learners, who needed Sign Language, was buttressed by the finding that deaf pupils indicated that they learnt more when Sign Language was used either in the resource room or in interpretations in the mainstream classes. The hearing specialist teachers who used Sign Language accommodations do not have native-like competency but the signs that they learnt in training were apparently appreciated by their pupils. At the very least the signs were more communicative to these visualizers than the mainstream teachers' written language on charts or their spoken language in class. This is also despite the fact that the interpretation that was being done tended to follow the word order of the spoken language and so according to Johnson et al. (1989) cannot be considered real interpretation. Though the school-heads were satisfied that each of their schools had a specialist teacher for the deaf, conducting in-service workshops for other teachers such training for mainstream teachers was inadequate. Firstly the training came from non-native users of Sign Language who can be presumed to have limitations in their knowledge of the language. Secondly the training was not followed up by constant practice of the language in everyday use as evidenced by the teachers saying they quickly forgot the signs. In other words, learning the alphabet, numerals and basic everyday communication might not be adequate to enable the teaching of academic content. For a pre-school learning environment such knowledge of Sign Language might be adequate, but for communication in a primary school, it is not inadequate. This is especially true in light of Nziramasanga's (1999) finding that even specially-trained teachers for the deaf had to be taught Sign Language by their pupils before they could teach them. If these same specialist teachers are then expected to train mainstream teachers so that they in turn can use Sign Language to teach the same deaf pupils, what Johnson et al. (1989) call lack of linguistic access to the curriculum, would appear to exclude the deaf pupils from learning in the mainstream.

Even if the specialist teachers had been proficient in Sign Language, the logistical arrangements of having to follow up individual children in the different classes would still be problematic. All this is happening in an environment where government, through the Education Secretary's Policy Circular Number 20 (2001), seems to have taken the stance that special needs education is every teacher's responsibility and so by implication every teacher is proficient in such areas as Sign Language. As Green and Engelbrecht (2007) point out, commitment to a different professional role does not immediately empower teachers with the skills to carry out the new role successfully. Most mainstream teachers are far from being able to teach deaf children using Sign Language. A related problem is the issue of specialist teachers making use of signing skills to explain concepts in the resource room after the main lesson. The impression may easily be created that such services are remedial and therefore by implication the deaf learners who have to have such extra services are retarded or have learning disabilities. As Glasser (1969) cited in Scheetz (2004) explains, pupils who cannot live up to the rigors of formalised education may develop a sense of powerlessness. The deaf students' self-esteem may therefore be threatened because of constant withdrawals to what others may perceive as remedial sessions, thereby negating inclusion. Bunch and Wedell (1995) point out many children with special needs in mainstream schools suffer from isolation and stigmatization.

The much awaited Zimbabwe Sign Language (ZSL) dictionaries are, by themselves, unlikely to solve the communication problems. The ZSL dictionary (Chimedza et al. 1998) is limited to vocabulary and there does not appear to be anything published on the structure of ZSL. In light of this, one wonders how well the Education Director's Circular Minute Number 2 (2001) that lists Sign Language as one of the school subjects is being implemented in order to include deaf pupils in school. In any case the fact that the schools are not being proactive to try to get the dictionaries and other Sign Language materials, through for example photocopying, may be indicative of low expectations about Sign Language. Such reluctance may vindicate Kiyaga and Moores' (2009) finding that in general, teachers of the deaf in sub-Saharan Africa mostly do not view Sign Language as a com-

plete language. Bauman (2004) also explains that spoken language has historically had status over Sign Language as a result of what he calls audism. These factors and *Shona / Ndebele* traditional beliefs about disability and deafness in particular may make it difficult for teachers to think of Sign Language as an equally legitimate language which can be used for including deaf children.

Most mainstream teachers acknowledged that teaching deaf children was difficult for them. Some said they were not conversant with appropriate skills and language for use. Large class sizes and inflexible time-tabling which did not allow for individualized attention most likely resulted in an attempt to cheat the system as seen in the allegation that certain teachers simply asked the deaf pupil to copy others' work. However, such observations being made by the specialist teachers may also be indicative of uncertainty as to whether they should have a supervisory or collegial relationship with the mainstream teachers. Such uncertainty may lead to resentment and contribute towards the exclusion of the deaf learners from mainstream activities. Johnstone (2007) observes that the more students in a classroom, the more challenges arise in terms of inclusive education because students may be unable to hear, see or follow the teacher because of distractions caused by overcrowding. Zimba et al. (2004) and Mowes (2002) also found that curriculum in Namibia did not make provision for children's different developmental and learning needs as it was not designed for learners with diverse needs, did not take into account their different learning speeds and excluded relevant content. Chireshe (2011) established that implementation of Zimbabwean inclusive education was hindered by the current curriculum which did not meet the needs of special needs children. In addition, teachers admitted to not having the skills to individualize instruction or address deaf children's specific special educational needs. These difficulties fly in the face of the teachers' assertion that they were happy to have deaf pupils in their classes. As noted by Johnstone (2007), teaching patterns which cover large amounts of content in short periods for large classes through lecture and assignments are detrimental to inclusive education.

Significantly, both mainstream teachers and school-heads mentioned that they thought that the deaf pupils would benefit more from the self-

contained resource room than they did in the mainstream classes. This could easily imply that the deaf pupils were not currently benefitting academically from their current placement in mainstream classes. It is also instructive, firstly, that many of the deaf pupils indicated that they were better off in the school's resource room with the specialist teacher rather in the mainstream classes with the regular teachers. Secondly, it may also be instructive that the deaf pupils did not participate in the oral lessons presented by the regular teachers but were active participants in the lessons where an interpreter was available. Interpretation of lessons into Sign Language is likely to foster a measure of participation and ultimately inclusion, notwithstanding the admitted fact that the interpretation itself is likely to be flawed because of inadequate Sign Language knowledge on the part of the specialist teachers who do not have native-like competency in the language.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that although including deaf students resulted in them socially benefiting, the practice was faced with many challenges. Measures such as learning some signs in a dictionary, on a chart or occasionally having a specialist 'interpreting' for the deaf learner are inadequate to include the deaf learners into the mainstream learning activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Schools should invite native signers such as adult members of the deaf community in order to provide continuous training in Sign Language to deaf and hearing pupils and their teachers.
- Schools should employ the services of relatively educated, hearing people with native-like competency in Sign Language in order for them to act as interpreters. Hearing offspring of deaf parents could play this role until the country has properly trained Sign Language interpreters. School heads and specialist teachers should hold awareness campaigns to sensitize mainstream teachers on classroom practices that may be discriminatory towards deaf learners.

- It is vital that Sign Language be considered as a complete legitimate language just like any spoken language and then find ways of ensuring all teachers and pupils master it in order to include deaf learners who need it in order to participate in learning activities.
- A cultural rather than a deficit model of inclusion should be followed. This might result in the acceptance of Sign Language as a complete language which needed to be mastered by all before it could be used in inclusive settings. Such a focus may result in deaf pupils enjoying successes in academic inclusion similar to their current successes in social inclusion.
- Schools should insist on the same high academic standards for deaf students that they expect from hearing pupils. In this way teachers would be forced to devise appropriate ways of engaging and including these learners in their lessons.
- All the stakeholders (deaf students, parents and teachers) should receive some guidance and counseling services so that they may be prepared for the inclusion and challenges associated with it.

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