A Survey of Opinions of Major Stakeholders Regarding the Feasibility and Necessity for the Hearing Impaired Child to Speak

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Abstract: *The study sought to find out the feasibility and necessity of the hearing impaired child to speak. The researchers after visiting one of the special schools in South Africa were amused to see the deaf children speaking. It is against this background that the researchers were prompted to carry out the study. A sample of twelve teachers from one special school in Zimbabwe was selected as a research study. The school head and fifteen students were also selected. A survey study was used. The research instruments used were document analysis, the questionnaires and the interview. Questionnaires were administered to twelve teachers and fifteen pupils. Face to face interview was carried out with one of the school heads. The study revealed that most teachers were not proficient in the use of the sign language so they welcomed the proposal of enhancing the deaf child to speak. Mixed sentiments were given by the deaf children. The idea of enabling the deaf child to speak was welcomed by most of the students. Some students furiously responded that they are not eager and will never bother themselves by trying to speak. The study recommended that both oral and sign language ought to be used so that the deaf child will not face communication challenges with their peers and the people at large. Teachers need to show a positive attitude and some dedication when dealing with the hearing impaired students. There is also need to have some workshops so that the teachers will learn the sign language since there is a recommendation to promote the learning of both oral and sign language. Parents for the deaf children should work hand in glove with the school to enhance their children to benefit from both ends, that is, the school and at home.*

Keywords: cochlear implants, hearing impaired, assistive device, handicap, communication paradigm, cultural differences, discrimination, identity, deaf culture.

1. Introduction and Background

Most stakeholders are facing challenges in handling the hearing impaired child in education. The problem is multi-faceted as there is the emergence of the deaf culture which in itself is fighting the battle of wanting to be mainstreamed. Their argument is that deafness or hearing impairment is not a disability and so those in the hearing culture should not look down upon the deaf culture. The deaf culture has its own way of communicating and those in the community communicate freely and easily amongst themselves (Moores, 2001). Epistemological speculations on the nature, identity of the deaf tend to marginalize the deaf. Within the deaf community there are some members who have been hearing for most of their lives and whose identity, manners fit hearing community. Much as they lost their hearing later in life they still yearn for the known culture and find a system to navigate back into the hearing culture that they want to embrace. These form a different subset and they grasp at every chance to hear again. Deaf people's language has been willfully suppressed in favour of speech. Education through speech has been imposed upon the deaf at high premium. However a challenge is encountered when communicating with the hearing culture. Communication experts claim that communication is a two way process of encoding and decoding for communication to take place (Owens, 1992). Hearing cultures use language to communicate with one another by using the spoken word alternating with listening. Predominantly, the hearing community wants to 'rehabilitate' their supposedly unfortunate counterparts so that they could join the main hearing and speaking club.

Communication comes in different forms of language within different cultures. Deaf cultures communicate in the way of sign language. People who are deaf have their own set of values, morals and beliefs just as people who can hear and speak have within their culture (Hybels and Weaver, 2007). They communicate in sign language and their communication skills values, morals, behaviours and attitudes come from the culture they live in (Jay, 2011). It is important to know the culture of the persons we come in contact with as well as appreciating their language. Orelove and Sobsey (1991) view the deaf culture as creating a demarcation or barrier by dividing people who are deaf from hearing people through communication. They further highlighted that deaf cultures should not be discriminated against just as it is immoral and unlawful to discriminate a person's culture, religion, race, creed, colour or gender. Thus a person's self- worth ought to be respected. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994), postulate that the hearing parents are facing a challenge to communicate better with their children through the use of sign language. They outlined the research that has shown that little interaction occurs between students who are deaf and those who are not. Some indications were also made that ninety percent (90%) of the children who are deaf have hearing parents therefore the problem of communication may be critical. To curb this there is need to use the common language to enhance effective communication. However, Moores (2001) proposes that the deaf should be firm to remain strong and promote their independence. To a greater extent if the hearing impaired is awarded some independence and proper education, they have the ability to function well and prosper just like any other individual.

2. Research Questions

- What communicative language is used by the hearing impaired children?

- To what extent does the teachers' attitude contribute to effective learning of the hearing impaired children?
- Are the communicative devices effectively used?
- To whose advantage is it to make the hearing impaired child speak?
- What are the likely benefits for the hearing impaired child to speak?
- What are the likely loses for the hearing impaired child to speak?

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:
- To analyze how teachers' attitude may contribute to effective learning of the hearing impaired children.
- To find out the communicative language used by the hearing impaired pupils
- To evaluate the impact of the new communicative devices
- To analyse the acceptance level of the new communicative paradigm among the beneficiaries

4. Research Methodology

Since it is the aim of this study to describe and expose the salient attitudes and opinions of the hearing impaired students, their teachers and administrators; the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were found to be quite complimentary. More specifically this is a survey research. Although the major purpose of the survey is to tell what is, yet this survey research attempts to go beyond that and interpret as well as make recommendations (Chitumba 1999). The survey is the best method which is available in collecting original data in its real setting. As noted by Srivastara (cited in Chitumba 1999) "surveys help to explain educational phenomena, opinions that are held by the students, teachers… and experts, effects that are evident or trends that are developing as the basis for decisions for improvement to administrators."

Three instruments were used namely the questionnaire, structured interviews and document analysis. Since there is no single research instrument superior on its own methodological triangulation is the strategy adopted for this study. Bryman and Bryman (1990) cited in Chingombe and Chingombe (2012) outline that methodological triangulation provides a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. The questionnaires are designed to gather the views of a group of selected respondents (McMillan and Wergin, 2010). In this study the questionnaires were administered to fifteen hearing impaired students and to gather their views towards the feasibility and necessity of helping or making the hearing impaired to speak. Open-ended and closed questionnaires were administered. A face to face interview was done with the school head. The researchers sought consent from the respondents before the instruments were administered.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is going to be guided by Vygosky and the Aristotelian theories, as well as the critical theoretical perspective (Chitumba, 2006). The critical paradigm, questions the status quo in fighting discrimination and inequality in social and educational spheres (Chitumba, 2013). This psychological and philosophical integrative approach, help explain and explode the myth surrounding issues of definition, identity and inclusion for the deaf culture. In view of this, Aristotle (cited in Copleston 2005) felt that the ability to speak offers a richer means of communication and thus had a theory that discriminated against people who were deaf when he thought that if every person could be educated or could ever learn anything it was through words that were spoken. Thus the hearing impaired people were seen as having a handicap and were thought of as being incapable of learning. This belief emanated from the feeling that speech is a gift from God and that its imperfection is a most melancholy proof of man's fall. Breadth of life was considered to reside in voice. According to Jay (2011) the law had labeled the deaf as 'non sense' people for they were criticized and belittled for not speaking. There is a belief that if teachers cannot properly communicate with their pupils acquiring of knowledge and skills will remains a nightmare. Feldman (2009) confirms that Vygosky highlights that children learn language from the significant others. This reflects that one's way of life is influenced by the people whom they associate with. In concurrence, Woolfolk (2001) argues that what children learn directly or indirectly is influenced by the way of life of those people with whom the children live. If children acquire the language skills they will not be sidelined.

Owen (1992) posits that communication is the process of exchanging ideas between participants where partners must be alert to the informational needs of the other to ensure messages are conveyed effectively and the intended meanings are preserved. Thus communication should promote interaction between people of different cultures, that is, the deaf and the hearing culture. Due to the cultural differences there is a barrier dividing people who are deaf from hearing people. There are deaf children whose parents do not know Sign Language. Lack of communication between the two cultures inhibits the interaction between people. The fact that the deaf don't share the same language with other hearing children they have a hard time in trying to socialize. So, to overcome this, there is need to have a common communication channel (Lane, 2005).

People who are deaf have a different way of communicating and have their own language that differs from the hearing culture. While there are ways of communicating in both hearing cultures and in deaf cultures there are differences in the way language is used. The challenge is that most hearing impaired pupils are from families who have no experience or knowledge of the deaf community. Therefore there is need for collaboration between the school and home because the hard of hearing pupils need proper communication both at school and at home. This would facilitate in the teaching and learning of the challenged pupils. Tompkins (2004) asserts that the deaf children need full access to communication. He further highlighted that the hindrance to educational success was blocked by limited access to communication. Plante and Beeson (1999) noted that communication through speech comes about when one person speaks and another listens and understands. Therefore by enhancing the deaf child to speak will result in everyone around the pupils being able to communicate fully with the pupils. To enhance

communication one ought to sign during the presence of the hearing impaired to promote total communication. This reflects that the hearing impaired cannot interact properly in hearing society without the use of an interpreter or other aids.

Teachers are obliged to be flexible enough to meet the individual needs of the learners. Understanding the home and school language is seemingly a challenge therefore there is need to avoid confusing the pupils by promoting the learning of a common language. Technically total communication is a philosophy and simultaneous communication is a method. The philosophy of total communication is that successfully communicating a message is most important, and the exact means used to achieve that goal is less important (Kent 1997). Thus, a conversation using this philosophy may include speech, sign, gesture, body language, facial expressions, eye movements, pictures, or writing. In certain cases, especially in therapeutic settings, even touch may play a part. Borden and Raphael (1994) postulate that total communication is often the best method for children who are not able to achieve significant levels of hearing with traditional hearing aids or cochlear implants; have developmental disabilities and want to learn to speak and to sign so that they will have increased options when they become adults. Some critics state that children in total communication programs do not learn either sign or English very well. Children may be educated in separate classes from hearing students but the goal is mainstreaming. A "successful" outcome from aural-oral training is considered to be an individual who can interact in hearing society without the use of an interpreter or other aids (Plante and Beeson 1999). Thus an individual can independently use oral language. Hallahan and Kauffman(1997) postulate that hearing impaired pupils with parents who are not deaf runs a greater risk of being unhappy because the parents are not proficient with the sign language and are unable to communicate with their children easily. They further revealed that ninety percent (90%) of children who are deaf have hearing parents. Therefore the problem of total communication remains a mystery. Interaction is also hindered with other siblings for they are not sharing the same culture.

6. Use of Assistive Devices

Divided attention is encountered by the hearing impaired children where sign language is prominently used for the child must attend to the signing as well as any instructional materials. Therefore there is need to facilitate learning through the use of a sole language. In order to increase information available through hearing, children are fitted with individualized amplification systems or cochlear implants (Sandlin, 2000).

The hard of hearing pupils use the hearing aids, cochlear implants and lip reading to assist them in communicating with other people. Easterbrooks and Baker (2002) recommended that cochlear implants help the pupils to receive their education via speech. Osberg et al (1991) revealed that research findings have shown that cochlear implants accelerated performance of pupils. They further highlighted that cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to

a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing. Dilon (2001) noted that the microphone on the cochlear picks up sound and is worn just behind the ear whilst the speech processor is worn on the body or sometimes just behind the ear with the microphone. Thus how it electronically finds useful sounds and then sends them to the brain. This enhances children to hear and speak thereby promoting them to participate in regular school classes without an interpreter thereby improving academic performance. Sandlin, R.E (2000) recommends the cochlear implants for allowing and leading the hearing impaired to lead a more 'normalized' live by improving social interactions and making the work environment a less stressful place to be in because of the increased amount of communication. This promotes easy communication since both cultures will be speaking with one voice. Andrews, Leigh, Weiner (2004) outlined that due to marginalization the chances of destroying the deaf culture are very high. They were of the feeling that the introduction of the cochlear implants seems to be a positive move towards hearing community who will incorporate the deaf into their own hearing culture.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presented was obtained from the three strata sample described above. A thematic approach was used to compare and contrast the views of the stakeholders. The administrator indicated that the staff is not proficient in sign language. He indicated that the language in use is half natural auditory. There was intimation that currently the hearing aids for the pupils are adequate. In response to the question which sought to find out how the administrators receive the idea of facilitating the hearing impaired to speak there was a feeling that it is good but needs a lot of dedication from parents , teachers, the students, administrators and the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture. Thus all stakeholders need to be fully engaged. The administrator felt it was very necessary to enhance the hearing impaired child to speak. In trying to reveal the benefits and loses of the hearing impaired child to speak the following remarks were obtained; on the positive side it was felt that the child would be fully rehabilitated since if the child is not assisted there is lack of independence. The hearing impaired is known as someone who does not have oral language therefore education becomes easier when there is oral communication. The administrator was complaining that some teachers transfer from the school after acquiring the expertise to use sign language thereby leaving the hearing impaired children at a disadvantage. However on the negative side must have a constant useful and powerful hearing aid or else more stress will be caused on the child for no apparent reason. One ought to be exposed to language every time. The cochlear implants which enhance hearing are very expensive as a result most of the pupils cannot afford to have them.

All the twelve teachers (100%) agreed that hearing impairment affects academic achievement to a greater extent. One of the teachers indicated that the written language is the spoken language so the hearing impaired child misses a lot on information and understanding, while another felt that these children grasp concepts after a lot of repetition. Nine teachers (75%) indicated that they use

English only when they are teaching whilst three (25%) showed that they use both sign and oral language. Six (50%) teachers out of twelve indicated that it is to the hearing impaired child's advantage to speak. Two teachers (16.7 %) felt that it was to the child's and the community's benefit whilst the other two felt that the child, family and the outside world benefited by enhancing a hearing impaired child to speak. Two teachers (16.7 %) excluded the child and mentioned the teacher, the child's parents, the school and the community to be the beneficiaries. In response to the question which sought to expose the benefits of the hearing impaired child to speak all the teachers (100%) cited that communication with the general public will be made easier. They also indicated that the child will acquire some independence as well as language. Four teachers (33.3%) noted that the child may lose identity of the deaf culture and sign language, two indicated that on (16.7%) loses are encountered. The other six (50%) indicated that the child will face difficulties in trying to fit into the new culture and the failure might lead to stigmatization.

Teachers highlighted that they were facing some challenges of language barrier as they will be communicating with the hearing impaired children for they were not proficient in sign language. Shortage of hearing aids was also outlined. In trying to seek data on the necessity of the hearing impaired child to speak nine teachers answered in the affirmative while three teachers gave conditional answer. One indicated that if the programme is started earlier it might work while the other two felt that with the necessary powerful hearing aids it will definitely work.

Responses from the students showed that one pupil fails in the 6-10 age range, seven are in the 10-15 age groups whilst the other seven are in the 15-20 age range. Four pupils indicated that they use both English and sign language when they are at home whilst eight indicated the use of English only. Two pupils indicated that they use Shona and the other one showed that he or she uses just sign language. From the data collected it unveils that fourteen pupils are born by parents who are not deaf while only one indicated that both parents are deaf. Four pupils indicated that they were not comfortable by using sign language whilst eleven outlined that they were very comfortable. The survey also revealed that five pupils had no hearing aids whilst ten showed that they have them. The ten who acknowledged having hearing aids recommended that they were quite beneficial while the other five have nothing to benefit from. Where they were asked to share their sentiments on how they feel about facilitating them to speak fourteen highly welcomed the idea whilst only one was against the idea. Those who were for the idea indicated that they wanted to be like the significant other by speaking while sole indicated that he or she does not welcome the idea because he or she does not know how to talk.

8. Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that the hearing impaired is at a disadvantage in the educational process because most of the teachers are not proficient in sign language which is the communication official language in the deaf community. As a result they are force– marched to learn in English or half sign language a situation that compromised their academic

achievement. Sandlin, R.E (2000) recommends the cochlear implants for allowing and leading the hearing impaired to lead a more 'normalized' live by improving social interactions and making the work environment a less stressful place to be in because of the increased amount of communication. It has also been revealed that resources are inadequate to enhance their learning. Much as the administrators said they had adequate resources it can be deduced from the teachers and the pupils that the hearing aids are not adequate. This is a serious set-back and negatively impact on academic achievement. There has been a lot of debate as to whether the hearing impaired child is disabled or not, yet from the age of pupils who participated in this study it shows that half of them are already beyond the ordinary level school going age. This could imply that they are already disadvantaged and this affects their academic achievement.

The majority of the participants in the study seem to welcome the idea of use of technology to enhance the hearing impaired child to speak. Most of them indicated that they wanted to be like the significant others. This shows that the zeal to be like their families would instill some dedication within the hearing impaired pupil. Feldman (2009) confirms that peers, siblings and friends transmit cultural tools such as language through socialization. This is in line with the finding in mainstream research which indicated that the deaf community is a community that needs to be uplifted so as to be able to join the mainstream hearing community. The one deserting voice of a student who does not welcome the idea of being made to speak also represent the other group in the debate who feel that there are issues of identity involved in the definition of deaf community as a disabled community. A lot of research has been generated mostly by those in deaf culture which is in line with emancipatory theorizing perspectives. They argue for being left alone, for the deaf culture not to be destroyed and not to be included in the hearing culture for they feel that sign language should be accorded the same status with the oral language. It is the contestation of this paper that though in the minority, the distinct dissenting voices have to be given their space and their concerns must be addressed. We agree with Obasis (2013)'s sentiments that the deaf people should have a choice of whether they want hearing aids that that may help them to hear and speak or whether they just want to remain in the deaf community. What also came out from the study is that fourteen (93.3%) out of fifteen students participants had been born of hearing parents whilst only one (0.7%) had both parents who are deaf. This concurs with Hallahan and Kauffman (1997)'s observations that ninety percent (90%) of children who are deaf have hearing parents. This however poses a challenge where the majority of parents have to learn sign language to enhance them to assist their children before they go to school. No wonder why most indicated that they use English/ Shona and a bit of sign language at home. The situation is not made easier at school where the students meet the teachers who can hardly use sign language. All the above factors seem to conspire to against good academic achievement.

9. Recommendations

Proceeding from the preceding discussion the following recommendations were made:

- Do not force the hearing impaired child to speak as this has serious implications on identity, stigmitisation and rights of the child.
- Programmes to rehabilitate, if genuine have to be started quite early and the hearing impaired child should not be used as guinea- pigs in technological experiments. Only tried and tested hearing aids which are digital have to be used.
- This calls for the proper funding of such projects from all stakeholders involved, that is, parents, school, community, hearing impaired child and the government.
- Further research has to be carried out especially to find out possibility of community involvement and the likely role it can play ii helping the hearing impaired child to speak.

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