



## THE IMPACT OF INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT INTO REGULAR SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF DAKAMELA PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ZIMBABWE

Tichaona Mapolisa<sup>†</sup>

*Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe*

Thembinkosi Tshabalala

*Faculty of Arts and Education, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe*

### ABSTRACT

*Children with hearing impairment have experienced discrimination from regular education. In the past, such children were institutionalised in separate classes or schools. According to Vayrynen (2000), most schools have been failing students with disabilities by denying them access to appropriate facilities. Children with hearing impairment have the right to be included in a least restrictive environment. Foster (1990) argues that to deny any child the opportunity to learn with their age mates age-mates and peers on grounds of an impairment is tantamount to jeopardising their later opportunity of living fully in a multi-cultural society. The Education Act (1987) in Zimbabwe stipulates that children with disabilities should be accommodated in ordinary schools for the purposes of learning. However, most teachers in Zimbabwean schools did not receive training on the teaching of children with impairments. It is on account of this that this present study attempts to gain insights into how children with hearing impairment benefit from learning in an inclusive environment with children whose hearing has no challenges. This article draws on a qualitative inquiry of teachers' experience in handling children with hearing impairment in their classrooms. A small sample of twenty (20) teachers comprising of ten (10) males and ten (10) females at Gomadoda cluster was chosen using purposive sampling. An interview schedule was used to collect data. Responses from respondents were captured and summarised to discern common patterns and then analysed and discussed. The study revealed that there are various problems met by children with hearing impairment in ordinary schools. The findings affirmed the assumption that most regular teachers lacked the necessary expertise and did not have adequate resources to handle children with hearing impairment. The study recommends that regular teachers undergo in-service programmes on how to effectively handle children with hearing*

<sup>†</sup> Corresponding author

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*impairment in regular classrooms. Teachers in regular classrooms should also be provided with proper equipment to empower them to teach these children effectively.*

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**Keywords:**

- Hearing impairment
- Inclusive education
- Regular school
- Teachers
- Specialist teacher
- Primary schools

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The philosophy of inclusion involves the movement of people with disabilities from institutions to community living, from special schools and from resource rooms or special classes to ordinary classes (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1994). For children with special needs, inclusion denotes full time attendance in an ordinary school with the necessary support and special services that the child may require. For children with hearing impairment in particular, inclusion would mean that they be educated within the same system as their hearing peers. Much of the philosophical rationale for inclusion comes from the principles of normalisation. Normalisation dictates that both the means and the ends of education for people with disabilities should be as normal as possible (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1994).

Placement of the child in an ordinary classroom is synonymous with full inclusion. This means that the child will be a bona fide member of the regular school system and have all his/her education in an ordinary classroom (Moores, 1996). As Maxon and Brackett (1992) observe, it is mainly the child with mild hearing impairment or those who are hard of hearing who would benefit from placement in an ordinary classroom. This is subject to the following conditions as outlined by Taylor *et al.* (1994) who advocate:

- Suitable amplification
- Favourable seating and lighting, which allow adequate distance from the speaker and good vision.
- The student may need attention to vocabulary and speech development as well as auditory training. Support services of a specialist teacher and speech and language pathologies may be required.
- A specialist teacher of children with hearing impairment may need to provide in-service training for the class teacher to discuss the impact of hearing loss on language development and learning as well as alerting the teacher to signs of a progressive hearing loss.
- The student's self esteem may need attention; it is not unlikely that frustration and feelings of inadequacy may become evident.

According to Chimedza and Peters (2001), inclusion was effectively realised after the Salamanca World Conference (1994). Both perceived inclusion as a holistic approach to the development of people with disabilities and a means to take care of the individual and societal needs. The Open

Files UNESCO (2003) on inclusive education also looks at all learners and their individual differences and difficulties. Thus, inclusive education involves all children learning together in the same physical environment. This background seems to indicate that inclusion of children with hearing impairment in ordinary schools is a right and not a privilege for children with this disability. The present paper sought to investigate the impact of involving children with hearing impairment in ordinary classrooms in Zimbabwean primary schools.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The study sought to investigate the impact of the inclusion of children with hearing impairment into regular schools.

### **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to scientifically explore the challenges experienced by children with hearing impairment in regular schools. It is envisaged that the study would enable the parents and teachers alike to appreciate inclusion of children with hearing impairment into regular classrooms. The study also hopes to provide policy-makers and curriculum innovators with data useful in the implementation of inclusion.

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study is anchored on the ensuing research questions.

1. Does the curriculum in ordinary schools meet the needs of hearing impaired children?
2. Are regular teachers trained to handle the hearing impaired children?
3. Do schools have adequate material resources to meet the needs of children with hearing impairment in regular classrooms?
4. What are regular teachers' and peers' attitudes towards teaching children with hearing impairment?

### **2.1. Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study stemmed from the fact that it attempted to identify and establish the actual experiences of children with hearing impairment as they learn within an inclusive environment. It is hoped that the study will contribute in the improved teaching and learning of both the hearing impaired and normal children in a non discriminatory environment. Inclusive education supports the principle that every child has a fundamental right to education and should be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning and that education systems should accommodate the diverse needs of learners. It was also hoped that the findings would help heads of schools, educational planners, policy makers and educational administrators realise the impact of existing conditions in ordinary classrooms regarding the hearing impaired children so as to devise programmes that will enhance the promotion of quality learning of children with hearing impairment in inclusive situations.

## 2.2. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the inclusion of children with hearing impairment in ordinary or regular schools. This study is also limited to a detailed account of what actually goes on in the classrooms and thus no more than a snapshot of practice in specific settings. Clearly, the findings cannot be generalised but they alert one to both the possibilities of including children with hearing impairment in regular schools and difficulties encountered in a small sample of Zimbabwean primary schools.

## 2.3. Delimitation of the Study

The researchers delimited the investigation to establishing challenges faced by and limitations faced by children with hearing impairment in regular schools. Challenges faced by children with other disabilities are outside the purview of this study.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration movement developed in the 1960s after the World War II (Wood, 1992). It was a way of liberalising the society, especially people with disabilities. There was a growing awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities. It was realised that the integrity and dignity of people with disabilities were to be provided within existing social, health, education and labour structures of the society. This led to inclusion (mainstreaming or integration) in schools for pupils with disabilities. Buttler (1990) states that curriculum is the content and sequence of knowledge to be taught in an area of instruction. A curriculum consists of aims, methods, resources and opportunities for learning as planned by the school (Belveridge, 2008). However, Badza and Chakuchichi (2000) posit that the curriculum in most schools in Zimbabwe is meant for people without disability. Thus, it does not accommodate the learning needs of children with hearing impairment. The provision of hearing aids and audiometers for the children with sensory impairments is not adequate (Hayes, 2009).

There is need for proper communication to be addressed by the curriculum designers such as the sign language and Braille writing in all schools for inclusion to hold water (Zindi, 1997). Teachers have problems in accessing the content of the curriculum. By reducing the content, the teacher will be catering for individual differences in the inclusion of children with hearing impairment (Dikinya *et al.*, 2004). Whereas when the curriculum is the same, there will be no individual education. Gearheart *et al.* (1992) argue that teachers teach the same things because there is no individual educational programme designed for children with special needs.

There are gaps in the mainstream curriculum which need to be filled to enable deaf children to fully benefit from it. The extent to which the curriculum should be modified is very great if all the children with disabilities needs are to be catered for (UNESCO, 1998). According to Badza and Chakuchichi (2000), the gaps to be filled include the social skills, communication and language, auditory training, vocational skills, teaching approaches, assistive devices and learning equipment.

Many teachers lack necessary experience and expertise to teach children with disabilities for example, which means that the aims and objectives of educating on inclusive class will always remain different (Hardman *et al.*, 1999). Zindi (1997) asserts that it is the duty of the teacher to organise curricula for the hearing impaired child so that it is less threatening. This depends on the

level of hearing, speech reading instructions and favourable sitting positions must be given to those children with learning impairment in regular classrooms (Gearheart *et al.*, 1992). The hearing aids are a pre-requisite for those with hearing between 40 – 55 decibels (Belveridge, 2008). Zindi (1997) concurs by stating that these hearing aids are used by the partially impaired sound signals. Children who cannot hear anything as loud as 90 decibels require special training such as sign language (Zindi, 1997). Nziramasanga (1999) is of the opinion that the curriculum for the deaf be set lower than those of hearing persons. Thus, children who are deaf are said to be lower academic achievers and so, the curriculum should fully accommodate their learning and social needs.

Badza and Chakuchichi (2000) state that the curriculum for the deaf and hard of hearing should include social skills and vocational skills. Education involves bringing up students into a social world in which they will participate. Like other forms of disability, lack of hearing imposes limitations on the individual's ability to acquire social skills, daily living skills, peer interaction, self concept, grooming, toileting, dressing and so on (Hardman *et al.*, 1999). The deaf learn appropriate social behaviours only when they are deliberately sequenced into the curriculum since most social skills, moral and behaviours are transmitted through communication with other people (Northern and Downs, 2005). Inclusion of social skills in the curriculum assists the deaf person to behave appropriately according to the norms of society in all common social settings (Warnock, 1982).

Buttler (1990) further points out that the curriculum for the deaf is not holistic without inclusion of vocational skills. Teaching of vocational skills to the deaf enables them to function independently as adults by assuming overall responsibility for their conduct. The vocational skills also help them to obtain and keep employment. For example, a deaf child who is good at metal work can be given access to the workshop and his/her potential assessment in terms of manual dexterity, attitude and aptitude (Warnock, 1982).

Out of this discussion emerges the importance of catering for the needs of children with hearing impairment who are found in ordinary classrooms. This study sought to reveal the actual situation experienced by these children in the ordinary classrooms in Zimbabwe's primary schools.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative methodology and made use of a case study design. The methodology and the design were selected because they afforded the teachers the opportunity to relive their experiences in their daily interactions with children with hearing impairment (Barbie, 1989). The sample consisted of twenty teachers purposively sampled from one cluster in Nkayi District in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The inquiry explored teachers' accounts on their experiences regarding the inclusion of children with hearing impairment in ordinary schools. Ten male and ten female teachers who were assumed to be information rich in regard to the issues of inclusion of children with hearing impairment into regular schools were expected to assist to assist with the generation of sought data. As Kapp (2005) emphasises that reaching pupils with special needs require more instructional time. He found that teachers have limited access to additional resources as these (resources) are scarce and fixed thereby, leading to negative attitudes in teaching pupils with hearing impairment.

#### 4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews lasting one hour using an interview guide. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and became the primary data source for analysis conducted by the researcher. The aim was to understand experiences from the participants' view. The benefit of using audio-taped interview in this study was that it permitted us to replay the interview over and over again in search of the generation of unique and diverse interpretations of the phenomenon under study (Cresswell, 2009). No attempt was made to generalise the findings or prove hypothesis. A transparent disclosure of the role of the researcher and his relationship with the participants, the "volunteering" of participants and descriptions of school settings was done to contextualise the research and allow for the impact of the researcher role and participant selection on findings. The use of a small sample is common in qualitative research where the aim is depth and not breadth.

### 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to investigate the effects of inclusion of children with hearing impairment in ordinary schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely demographic data an actual findings as well as discussion.

#### 5.1. Demographic Data

**Table-1.** Distribution of Research Participants by Sex (N = 20)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	10	50
Female	10	50
Total	20	100

The above table (Table 1) reveals that 50 percent of the respondents were male and another 50 percent female. There was therefore, a gender balance.

**Table-2.** Age Ranges of Teachers (N = 20)

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
21 – 30	5	25
31 – 40	12	60
41 – 50	3	15
50+	0	0
Total	20	100

Table 2 shows that the majority of teachers involved in the study were those in the age range 31 – 40 years (60%). These in the 21 – 30 years range constituted 25% of the sample. The 41 – 50 years range was 15% of the sample. None fell within the 51 plus age range. This information reveals that the majority of the sample teachers were relatively young and likely to lack the experience and patience to deal with children with disabilities.

**Table-3.**Professional Qualifications of Respondents (N = 20)

<b>Professional Qualifications</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Diploma / Certificate in Education	16	80
Bachelor of Education (General)	1	5
Diploma in Special Education	2	10
Bachelor of Education in Special Education	1	5
Other (specify)	0	0
Total	20	100

Table 3 above shows that 80 percent of the respondents were holders of the Certificate or Diploma in Education. The research participants who were in possession of a professional qualification in Special Education, that is, Bachelor of Education in Special Education constituted 15 percent. This reveals that the majority of teachers lack the necessary training to help them handle children with hearing impairment.

## 5.2. Actual Research Findings and Discussion

According to international literature, children with hearing impairments face a myriad of obstacles as they attempt to learn in regular classrooms and schools and yet it is their human right to receive their education in these ordinary schools.

Evidence from the study revealed that the curriculum in ordinary schools is meant for children without hearing impairment. Most teachers admitted that they conducted their lessons as though they were teaching children who were the same physically and mentally. As [Gearheart et al. \(1992\)](#) observed, when the curriculum is the same for different children, then there is no education taking place. An overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that there was need for a modified curriculum so that it can cater for the needs of the hearing impaired. [Zindi \(1997\)](#) asserts that the teacher has a duty to organise the curriculum for the hearing impaired children so that it is less threatening. [Hawkins \(2005\)](#) advocates for gaps to be filled in the national curriculum to equip children with hearing impairment with social skills, communication and language, auditory training, vocational skills, teaching approaches, assistive devices and learning equipment. Hence, the curriculum should suit their learning and social needs.

It was also evident that the majority of teachers had no experience in teaching children with hearing impairment in an inclusive setting. Neither were they in possession of an appropriate qualification to properly guide children with hearing impairment. It is very clear that there is a shortage of specialist teachers to teach the hearing impaired in regular schools. It is possible that teachers with specialist training to handle children with hearing impairment are concentrated in special schools. As [Buttler \(1990\)](#) argues, in such circumstances, it is not educationally prudent to implement inclusion of hearing impaired in regular schools without adequate trained teachers.

The majority of respondents indicated that they had inadequate resource materials to meet the needs of children with hearing impairment. They revealed that there was an acute shortage of materials in their schools to meet the needs of children with hearing impairment. This tallies with observations made by the [Salamanca World Conference \(1994\)](#) that the infrastructure like classrooms with wide low windows and acoustically treated rooms to cater for children with profound hearing impairment to use in their learning situations was not enough. The researcher also

observed that all the children with hearing impairment did not have hearing aids. All the respondents confirmed that hearing devices were not available to the hearing impaired. This, therefore, means that the children's rights to communicate and attain their potentialities is likely to be denied. Zindi (1997) posits that hearing aids are a pre-requisite for those with hearing loss of between 40 – 55 decibels. The hearing aids are necessary in order to increase the loudness of sounds.

During the interviews, an overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that they were not comfortable with having a student with hearing impairment in their classrooms. This implies that most teachers still hold negative attitudes towards the hearing impaired children. Some of the reasons put forward for little interest towards these impaired children included that attending to one child with hearing impairment was like teaching five normal children, the teacher had to always speak at the top of their voice among others. This implies that there is need for extra time and work for the children with hearing impairment to benefit academically and socially from ordinary classrooms. This is affirmed by Friel and Hay (1996) who hold the view that class teachers express concern when they have a handicapped child in their classroom as a lot of individual attention is needed for such a child. On another dimension, the researcher found out that the regular teachers' negative attitudes were in part due to lack of knowledge and they do not understand how or why they should individualise their instruction. This is aptly summed up by Hergaty (2007) who observe that favourable attitudes of regular classroom teachers were crucial for the successful of inclusion programmes.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the preceding findings, the following conclusions suffice.

- For children with special needs, inclusion denotes full time attendance in an ordinary school with the necessary support of special services that the child may require. For children with hearing impairment in particular, inclusion would mean that they be educated within the same system as their hearing peers.
- The majority of teachers were not qualified professionally to handle children with hearing impairment. There were very few specialist teaches in the regular schools to give a holistic education and developmental approach to the children with hearing impairment.
- There are very limited resources to cater for children with hearing impairment. The children lack acoustically treated rooms and hearing aids to suit their learning needs. Thus, most of the infrastructure in the regular schools did not meet the fundamental requirements of children with hearing impairment.
- The majority of respondents indicated that there was need of adjusting the curriculum to suit the needs of the children with hearing impairment.
- Socially, teachers revealed that there were communication problems in some instances which made the normal children to interact minimally with children with hearing impairment. For example, children with speech problems who may fail to articulate some words and the hearing impaired who use sign language may not be understood by other normal children.



- Most teachers were not comfortable with having a child with hearing impairment in their classrooms as they regarded them as underachievers and extra burden on their work. They felt that this was work for specialist teachers.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having the above findings and conclusions, the researcher puts forth the following recommendations:

- There should be an element of special education in all teacher education programmes at teacher training colleges and universities so that all teachers have some working knowledge of handling children with hearing impairment.
- Teachers and heads in regular schools should be assisted to hold in-service programmes and workshops at cluster level to equip them with various approaches in handling the children with hearing impairment.
- Regular teachers should learn sign language for easier communication with the children with hearing impairment.
- Curriculum planners and designers should modify the national curriculum to suit the needs of the hearing impaired.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture should include specialist teachers, regular teachers, parents, heads and politicians in the designing of a holistic curriculum that will effectively cater for the needs of all children.
- All schools should be equipped with the right equipment like hearing aids and acoustically treated rooms to cater for children with hearing impairment.
- It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture should articulate a clear policy on inclusion and provide adequate financial support to all the schools.

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#### **AUTHORS' BIO-DATA**

- 1. Professor Tichaona Mapolisa** is a National Programme Leader for the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. To date, he has published more than 25 research articles in international peer reviewed journals. He has presented 22 papers at international conferences and five papers at local conferences. He has published two books with Lambert Academic Publishing House (LAP). He can be contacted by business address: Zimbabwe Open University P.O.Box MP1119 Mount Pleasant Harare, Zimbabwe OR by

Cell phone:+263 733 608 577 or +263 775 987 351 or by E-mail: [tichmap@gmail.com](mailto:tichmap@gmail.com)/  
[tichmapolisa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tichmapolisa@yahoo.co.uk)



- Dr. Thembinkosi Tshabalalais** is a Senior Lecturer and National Programme Leader for the Master of Education in Educational Management in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. To date, he has published more than 3 research articles in international peer reviewed journals. He has presented 8 papers at international conferences and 10 papers at local conferences. He can be contacted by business address: Zimbabwe Open University P.O.Box MP1119 Mount Pleasant Harare, Zimbabwe OR by Cell phone:+263 776 425 222 or by E-mail: [tshabalalathembinkosi@yahoo.com](mailto:tshabalalathembinkosi@yahoo.com)



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