

**The Voice of the Voiceless: The plight of
Early Childhood Children living with hearing
impairment in Masvingo.**

A paper presented by

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We know that equality of individual ability has never existed and never will, but we do insist that equality of opportunity still must be sought."

-- [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#)

The only disability in life is a bad attitude."

-- Scott Hamilton

All young children need essential learning opportunities in settings that stimulate and maximise their overall development and functioning .

- early childhood inclusion therefore embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.

Objectives

- to explore the magnitude of mainstreaming ECD children with Hearing impairment in public schools;
- to ascertain stakeholders' perceptions regarding inclusion of children who are Deaf;
- to establish the inclusive initiatives in public schools for children with hearing impairment;

Research questions

- To what extent are ECD children included in mainstream educational programmes.
- What inclusive initiatives are there in public schools for children with hearing impairment
- How effective are inclusionary policies for ECD children with hearing impairment in Zimbabwe?
- How do stakeholders perceive the inclusion of ECD children with hearing impairment?

Overview

- The right of early childhood children with disabilities to be educated in their neighbouring mainstream centres are becoming increasingly accepted in most countries including Zimbabwe
- In this regard ,many reforms are being put in place to attain this aspiration. To this end, a myriad of legislative enactments both nationally and internationally such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of (1989), the Salamanca Statement (1994) as Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (2008) have served as catalysts for societies to consider how a more equitable education system could be developed to address the needs of all learners.
- Jenjekwa,Rutoro and Runyowa (2013) maintain that prior to imbabwean independence, educating children with hearing impairment has been a priority for church run institutions whose main method was establishment of special schools.

- Even though special schools and integration units went a long way in trying to meet educational needs of children with hearing impairment, they sort of violated the provisions of the rights of these young children to learn and develop in the care of their immediate families, communities as well as their peers.
- having children with a hearing impairment in inclusive early childhood programmes help children to discover their difference in a positive way, sets a precedent for inclusion as a norm thereby reducing the possibility of children developing negative attitudes towards others with a disability later in life..

- most studies on inclusion in Zimbabwe were conducted on primary and secondary school settings and very little seems to have focused on the ECD child .
- studies that have been done on early childhood development and these may not be easy to contextualise given considerable contextual, economical and socio-cultural differences.

- The Nziramasanga commission of inquiry into the education and training (1999) found out that there were no equal opportunities for access to education for ECD children of the ages three to five. As a follow up, the government of Zimbabwe instituted Director Policy Circular 14 of (2004) which directed that all public primary schools enrol “all” children between the age 3-5 in public schools.
- The aim of all these provisions was making sure that “all” children get the best possible start in life since children in this age group are in the midst of immense growth, acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities in several interconnected realms.

- this research infers the present status of ecd children with hearing impairment in Zimbabwean public ecd centres with the view of informing both policy and practice.
- much remains to be learned on how public child care environments serve the needs of all children including those with hearing impairment.

Statement of the problem

- Accessibility, equity and participation of all children are critical issues in early childhood inclusive education.
- As a matter of fact, children with hearing impairment are disproportionately denied their right to education, which undermines their ability to enjoy the full rights of citizenship.
- This research therefore interrogates the extent to which early childhood children are included in mainstream ECD classes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative

methodology afforded me the opportunity to hear voices and learn experiences of children with H.I. as important stakeholders in their learning process

Case study

- This allowed the research to probe and explore the inclusive practices in public ECD settings; particularly children with HI.

Data Collection Methods

1. Observation
 - to allow first hand and systematic noticing and recording of events, behaviours within the social setting, (Marshall, 2006).
2. Interviews
 - chosen because of their capacity to make available in-depth information on participants' experiences through one on one interaction, (Turner, 2010).
3. Focus group discussions
 - preferred because they provided "direct evidence, similarities and differences in the participants opinions as opposed to reaching at such conclusions through post hoc analysis" (Morgan, 2013:10).

Population and sample

- **Population:** All ECD teachers, School heads, as well as parents and children with hearing impairment in Masvingo Urban public schools.
- **Sample:** 12 schools, 1 education officer, 12 School heads, 10 ECD teachers and 10 parents and 10 children with hearing impairment.
- The samples were purposively drawn considering the requisite aspects relevant for this research.

Findings

1. About 83% of early childhood children who live with hearing impairment do not access early childhood development services. Parents had very little knowledge on inclusion one parent even said that,
2. Deaf children also wanted to learn with others in public schools. One child said that "We play with others here at home but we do not go to the same school, why?My parents tell me that I will go to a school for the deaf"
3. Parents lacked knowledge on inclusion hence their children with H.I. were stigmatised, discriminated against or denied access into mainstream schools. One parent even said "*If it was allowed for Deaf children to learn in these ordinary schools then parents' burdens were going to be alleviated because we have difficulty in sending the little ones to special schools which are far away from our care and support*"

Findings continued

4. Teachers and School heads had knowledge on inclusion but lacked financial and material resources which rendered them unreceptive for young children who were deaf. *“In, as much as I may want to enrol Deaf ECD children, my school does not have enough human expertise and financial resources to buy hearing aids and other necessary equipment”.*

5. Families have devised rudimentary sign language to communicate and start to teach them the basics out of school.

6. Absence of clear cut policies on inclusion of children who are deaf still pose a stumbling block on children with hearing impairment. the education officer maintained that these provisions were not segregatory hence they were binding for all children.

When further probed on what they did to follow up on the enrolment of children who are deaf in ECD centres the officer maintained that parents whose children were denied access needed to report such cases to their offices.

4. Absence of clear cut policies on inclusion of children who are deaf still pose a stumbling block on children with hearing impairment. the education officer maintained that these provisions were not segregatory hence they were binding for all children.

5. When further questioned on what they did to follow up on the enrolment of Deaf children in ECD centres the officer maintained that parents whose children were denied access needed to report such cases to them.

Recommendations

- An early identification model has to be put in place to allow for early intervention.
- There is need for a clearly formulated, communicated and enforceable national early childhood policy on inclusion.
- There should be mandatory training in sign language to Early Childhood teachers and support staff.
- ongoing research should be considered critical on perceived programmes that cater for the needs of parents, schools and ECD children with hearing impairment.
- Outreach services and awareness campaigns are essential to identify and serve all children with hearing impairment.

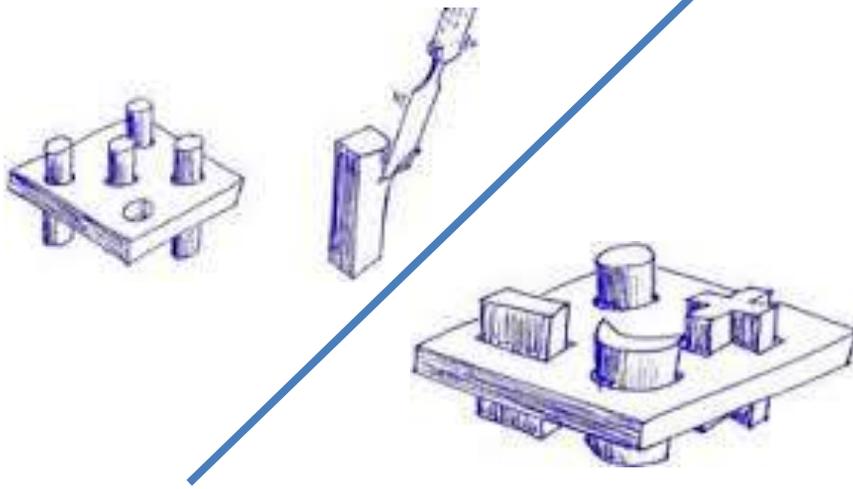
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Who then going to speak for the voiceless child?

Researchers should be enthused to act as a voice of the voiceless with an aim of ushering in a long march to freedom of my children, your children, our children, who are at most as we speak today abandoned and neglected.

Research should usher in a new dispensation driven by the desire to engage all stakeholders in championing the cause of inclusive education particularly in a bid to address the plight of children with Hearing impairment.

Adjusting a hole to make the peg fit in rather than adjusting the child to fit in the whole.



Tatenda
Thank you

