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The Deinstitutionalisation of Education for the Deaf: Exploring the Experiences of a School in Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The Principle of Normalisation and adopting international conventions on disability issues saw deinstitutionalisation becoming a global trend. The study explored the deinstitutionalisation of a school for the Deaf in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study used the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach, and narrative research design. The initial study population comprised twelve Learner Welfare Officers (LWOs) and four school administrators. Purposive sampling was used to select the three LWOs and two school administrators. After failing to reach theoretical saturation, a teacher was purposively sampled from a population of sixteen teachers. A Deaf and a hearing learner were also purposively sampled from 240 learners to fill the theoretical gap. Data were collected using interviews with the respective participants. Data were presented and analysed using Riessman's interactional model. The study found that deinstitutionalisation was a global trend as well as a government policy. The study also found that deinstitutionalisation led to reverse inclusion. Moreover, the study found that deinstitutionalisation benefited both Deaf and hearing children. Further, the study found that mainstream schools had resource

challenges in implementing deinstitutionalisation. Based on these, the study recommended that the government should ensure that deinstitutionalisation is also a school policy. The study further recommended that the government avail requisite resources before implementing deinstitutionalisation.

Keywords: *Institutionalisation, Deinstitutionalisation, Deaf Education, D/Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Principle of Normalisation, Reverse Inclusion*

Introduction

During the eugenics period, children with disabilities led a devalued life. They were killed because they were viewed as not fit to be considered humans. The lives and reproduction of Deaf children were viewed as a stream that would continue to supply similar children. The improvement in humankind's attitudes saw Deaf children being allowed to live away from mainstream society. Their education was, therefore, institutionalised to separate them from 'humans' in the mainstream culture. This led the Deaf children to lead a devalued and pitiful life. The institutions where they were confined were homes and schools simultaneously. In Scandinavian countries, children with disabilities were sent to institutions where they were forgotten. They lived in institutions without their parents visiting them, leaving them to lead a life without parents, siblings, and their home culture. They lived a devalued life. From this background, the Principle of Normalisation by Wolfensberger (1972) was born to redress the service imbalances between the children with disabilities and the 'normal' ones. The Principle of Normalisation sought to reverse the pitiful and devalued lives of children with disabilities to valued lives through a rights-based approach (Singh & Thressiakutty, 2015). The selected school was built using the Scandinavian model of a home and a school for the Deaf. The school was one of the first institutions for the Deaf in Zimbabwe. The construction of this school led to the institutionalisation of Deaf education in the Harare region.

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theory. ABCD theory is based on the premise that every community member is important for its development (ABCD Toolkit). According to ABCD theory, every community member has a significant role to play in the survival and development of its community.

Based on this, the ABCD theory would lead to deinstitutionalisation to bring in hearing children who would play their part in the functionality of the selected school. The school would role-valorise both the Deaf and the hearing children, and this co-existence would lead to acceptance of diversity in the school and beyond (ABCD Toolkit; Singh & Thressiakutty, 2015). Acceptance of diversity could lead Deaf and hearing children in school to view each other as equal partners in education and the community in general.

Review of the Literature

The Principle of Normalisation led to the deinstitutionalisation of the education of the Deaf. After the birth of the Principle of Normalisation, many frameworks for action and United Nations Conventions started preaching the deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities, for instance, the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) (2006), and the Incheon Declaration (2015). Conventions and frameworks of action on disabilities reiterate that children with disabilities should learn in inclusive schools close to their homes, where they lead their daily lives in a kinship within their culture. In line with this, learners with disabilities should learn at local schools and should be able to benefit from all school programmes (Pilon, 2013). Thus, learners should not be left behind in all school programmes (No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, 2001). The position of the World Federation of the Deaf (2018) is that Deaf children should be educated in high-quality inclusive education systems with local sign languages as a medium of instruction.

In Scandinavia, which is popularly known as the 'strong welfare region for children with disabilities', a study conducted by Swanwick *et al.* (2014) revealed that the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education was based on culture and language. Similarly, a study by Dammeyer (2010), in the same region, confirmed that deinstitutionalisation of the education of the Deaf depends on the scenarios they have been subjected to, for instance, Sign Language (SL), attending a school for the Deaf, and immersion in Deaf culture or exposure to technological amplification devices. Such factors influence how Deaf children adapt to deinstitutionalisation. Besides, Dammeyer and Ohna (2021) reveal that the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education is strongly influenced and regulated by national policies and funding.

Communication is a critical component in an educational environment. Deaf and hearing learners may have different communication modes that may lead to communication barriers. Communication challenges may be a barrier to the deinstitutionalisation of a school. For instance, in Norway, Kermit and Holiman (2018) found that there are a host of barriers to deinstitutionalisation, including communication barriers due to different language modalities. The study by Powell, Hyde and Punch (2014) established that there were language and communication barriers that led to the need for interpreters in the SL to ease communication between the Deaf and the hearing. Their study further revealed that while hearing learners could only use a spoken modality, Deaf learners preferred and could only use Sign Language for communication purposes. Similarly, Noble's (2010) study revealed that critical to deinstitutionalisation is the readiness of the teacher and other stakeholders to receive Deaf learners. In a similar development, Rose and Yerrik (2015) found that a good teacher should establish the needs of the deaf learner from the deaf learner. A good teacher may, therefore, establish an ecological inventory of needs from the Deaf learners. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, few, if any, studies were conducted on how deinstitutionalisation was practised in the school. The study, therefore, sought to explore how language, the culture of the Deaf and legislation influenced deinstitutionalisation. The study also sought to find out how teachers managed teaching in a deinstitutionalised setting.

The current trend views disability as a social construct (UN-CRPD, 2006). A study by Freedman and Ferri (2017) established that the reconstruction of the social minds of stakeholders in education is important in deinstitutionalising Deaf education. Similarly, the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education requires that all stakeholders have positive attitudes towards the Deaf and treat them as equal partners in education (Anastasiou, Kauffman & Di Nouvo, 2015). A study by Anastasiou et al. (2015) recommends that governments ensure that the right of the Deaf to inclusive education at all levels is realised. Therefore, the UN-CRPD (2006) and Anastasiou et al. (2015) call for total deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education. Regarding this, Italy has a high precedence of deinstitutionalisation of the education of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), backed by legislation and policy (Anastasiou et al., 2015). Legislation may be important in implementing deinstitutionalisation. In the United States of America (USA), school districts have the mandate to provide students with SEN opportunity to benefit from school district programmes which are the same as those of

children without SEN, preferably in a deinstitutionalised set-up (Osgood, 2005; Pilon, 2013; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Studies have hailed legislative guidelines as critical strides in a positive direction toward deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education in the US schools (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Legislation and policy are critical in shaping the deinstitutionalisation of the education of the Deaf. With few studies, if any, in the field of school deinstitutionalization in Zimbabwe, the study sought to establish if legislation and policy existed and were influential in the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education students at the selected school.

Generally, people view learners with SEN as the only ones who should be referred to as included in deinstitutionalisation. However, studies have shown that it is the minority that may be considered included in deinstitutionalisation. A case in point is that of Poorman (1980), who revealed the feasibility of reverse inclusion. Poorman (1980) worked with learners with severe disabilities at an institution where it was thought that neither the 'normal' nor those with SEN would benefit from deinstitutionalisation. According to Poorman (1980), children with severe disabilities in the school were thought to be unsuitable to be educated in deinstitutionalised settings. Nevertheless, he thought otherwise and demonstrated that teaching children with severe disabilities could be feasible in deinstitutionalised settings in a process termed 'reverse inclusion'. For instance, his notion was that bringing hearing learners into institutions would bring about experiences in the interaction between the Deaf and hearing children. A reverse-inclusive class would be composed of mainly Deaf learners with a few hearing children (Poorman, 1980). A study by Elaldi, Cifci and Yerliyurt (2021) revealed that the success of Deaf learners hinges on deinstitutionalisation in a reverse inclusion model, where they would be a dominant group that may not be looked down upon. In agreement, in deinstitutionalisation, Deaf and hearing learners help each other socially and academically (Diamond & Carpenter, 2000). Ozgur (2013) and Ari (2015) hold similar views by revealing that reverse inclusion significantly positively influences the academic performance, social and emotional growth of Deaf learners. Studies have revealed that reverse inclusion provides Deaf children with a platform for the development of communication skills with as much progress on cognitive, language, emotional and social development as hearing children (Poorman, 1980; Alıcı, 2018; Elaldi et al., 2021). Similarly, a study by Schoger (2006) found that reverse inclusion offers the deaf and hearing learners a platform to operate as

full-time equal partners, both in social and academic spheres. Therefore, the study sought to explore reverse inclusion and its importance in deinstitutionalisation.

Deinstitutionalisation in general, and reverse inclusion in particular, have limitations in their implementation. World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) (2018) claims that schools lack resources for Deaf learners due to their lack of understanding of the requisite needs in the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education, knowledge of its implementation. Similarly, Poorman (1980) and Elaldi et al. (2021) note a lack of resources as key setbacks in practising reverse inclusion. Elaldi et al. (2021) further revealed that there was a myriad of expectations in reverse inclusion from all the stakeholders, which could be difficult to harmonise; for instance, parents may quickly expect better academic performance while the school is still worried about adaptation and eliminating alienation. Therefore, the study sought to establish the challenges to deinstitutionalisation in general, and reverse inclusion in particular, in the school.

Research Question

1) What are the reasons for deinstitutionalisation and the benefits thereof?

Methodology

Research Paradigm, Approach, and Design

The study adopted Interpretivism. The suitability of this paradigm for the study was based on views that acknowledge that what researchers seek is based on deeply understanding the views of the participants in their social context, taking into account their subjective views (Tuli, 2010). Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, the study used the qualitative research approach. The researcher intended to explore the lived experiences of the participants in the context in which the study was conducted and focused on the quality of dialogic processes between the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A narrative research design was used to enable the researcher to systematically capture, gather, analyse, and represent participants' lived stories as they told and lived them in time, in space, in person, and in relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Population and Sample

The initial population of the study consisted of the twelve Learner Welfare Officers (LWO) at the Harare Metropolitan Offices of Learner Welfare and four school administrators. From this population, purposive sampling was used to initially select three LWOs and two school administrators. After failing to reach theoretical saturation, one teacher from a population of sixteen teachers, a Deaf and a Hearing learner from a total of two hundred and forty learners were purposively sampled. These participants were sampled purely to fill the information gap that existed after collecting data from the original sample.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews were used to collect data from LWO, School Administrators (SA), a teacher (Tr), a Deaf Learner (DL), and a Hearing Learner (HL). Learner Welfare Officers were relevant in this study because they were the custodians of institutions for the Deaf. The three LWOs were identified as LWO1, LWO2, and LWO3, respectively, while the SAs were identified as SA1 and SA2. The researcher preferred interviews over other methods to collect detailed and quality data from the participants on the deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education and to reconstruct the meanings together.

Data Analysis

The study adopted Riessman's Interactional Model of data analysis, which states that humans are storytelling organisms and construct meanings out of these stories. The Interactional Model of data analysis was relevant because it enabled the researcher to present data in a narrative form to maintain the meanings of the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical clearance to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. Participants were informed of their voluntary participation, to which they consented, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty was guaranteed. Participants were also briefed on anonymity.

Findings

Deinstitutionalisation

The institution was established in 1947. Zimbabwean legislation on deinstitutionalisation was promulgated in 1987. However, the deaf children remained institutionalised at the school. In relation to this, two LWOs and a SA expressed the following:

> Institutionalisation is problematic in many ways, including segregation, stigmatisation, and unequal educational opportunities. Inclusion is the in thing these days. We are deinstitutionalising; hence, former institutions are also enrolling hearing children (LWO 1).

> Deinstitutionalisation has been a government policy and law since 1987, and we have decided to take the initiative. We are the best model of deinstitutionalisation (SA1).
>
> Every government has a global mandate to deinstitutionalise, following the international community's call through various conferences and conventions (LWO 2).

Deinstitutionalisation was a global norm that everyone had to embrace. The selected school took the initiative to deinstitutionalise and became the best deinstitutionalisation model in Harare and the country. Apart from the government's call, institutionalisation was considered outdated, depriving Deaf children of the right to equal education. Institutionalisation was also viewed as having adverse effects on the social life of the Deaf. Deinstitutionalisation was a moral obligation to accord the Deaf universal education, social life, and services (Wolfensberger, 1972; UN-CRPD, 2006).

Reverse Inclusion

Deinstitutionalisation meant that Deaf children had to move to mainstream schools near their homes. To this effect, the selected institution's students would be depleted numerically. It could sound as if the institution closed its doors due to losing students to mainstream schools. On what caused the existence of the institution after deinstitutionalisation, two LWOs made the following presentations:

> I can cite the example of... school. Although it is still called... school for the Deaf, nowadays the school practises inclusivity, they have deinstitutionalised and are enrolling hearing children to learn and interact with Deaf learners. We term this kind of deinstitutionalisation 'reverse inclusion'. Inclusion occurs not only in mainstream schools but also in institutions (LWO 1).
>
> Indeed, we are now enrolling hearing children, and they are very well in sync with the Deaf (SA2).

Based on the (Zimbabwean) Education Act (1987) that children should attend their nearest school, some Deaf children left the selected institution and enrolled in some mainstream schools near their homes. Despite this outward movement of learners, the selected institution did not close its doors. The gaps left by Deaf children who left for schools near their homes were filled by local hearing children who joined to learn alongside the Deaf children (Poorman, 1980; Elaldi et al., 2021). There was reverse enrolment. Thus, the institution for the Deaf was also enrolling hearing children to learn alongside the Deaf children in reverse inclusion. The Deaf and hearing children bonded and worked together in harmony. Deinstitutionalisation, therefore, meant that the school was enrolling children it initially excluded.

In a follow-up on who was the majority in a reserve inclusion scenario and who were considered included, a participant made the following presentation:

> Yes. Before we talk of inclusivity, we should ask ourselves: Who are the excluded? Inclusivity does not only mean that children with disabilities are included. The hearing children were the ones who were formerly excluded, so they are now included, but they are fewer than the Deaf children (LWO 1).

Before deinstitutionalisation, the selected institution excluded hearing children. The populace generally believed that only the Deaf were excluded or included. Reverse inclusion meant that hearing learners were included in the selected school for the Deaf. However, the included learners were determined by who was initially excluded. In this scenario, the hearing children were the ones included because the institution initially excluded them. Like mainstream schools, the institution for the Deaf abandoned its separatist or exclusive culture and started enrolling hearing children.

Status of the Resource of the Former Institution after Deinstitutionalisation

The institution remained relevant to the education system in Harare and throughout Zimbabwe post-deinstitutionalisation. It maintained its state of self-stability in terms of resources. The selected school remained one of the most suitable centres for educating Deaf children in the era of deinstitutionalisation. Two of the LWOs gave the sentiments below to show the relevance of the former institution to deinstitutionalisation:

> Institutions are fully equipped for Deaf children. They do their placement in their schools using their audiometric assessment results. Normally, they refer their children for psychological evaluations so that we can see how best these learners can benefit from the services offered at the school. What are the talents of the child that need to be nurtured? Yes, they have special needs, but 'Disability is not inability'. We evaluate and make recommendations specific to each child (LWO 1).

> The availability of resources in mainstream schools depends on the funds from the Treasury. The government regulates school fees to levels that are affordable to all parents, limiting the procurement of resources. Without donors, schools are financially crippled (LWO 2).

The selected institution remained a key school in deinstitutionalisation because it was fully furnished for the education of Deaf children. The school relied primarily on its resources to educate Deaf children. While mainstream schools struggled to meet the resource needs of the Deaf learners, the selected school did not exert financial pressure on the government to obtain the exorbitant resources specific to Deaf children. Donor funding was of little benefit to the institution. The institution provided a learning environment that met the needs of its learners (Elaldi et al., 2021). To this effect, the WFD (2018) asserts that Deaf children are placed in mainstream schools that do not have the requisite resources without considering or understanding the broader definition of inclusion. The former institution mainly lacked technical human personnel, like psychologists for psychological evaluations. Otherwise, skilled teaching personnel and material resources were adequately available. The availability of skilled teaching personnel ensured that the gifted and talented learners, the Deaf and hearing, were taken care of.

Benefits of Deinstitutionalisation

Deinstitutionalisation had benefits for both hearing and Deaf children as well as their communities. Benefits included giftedness and acquisition, and spreading of SZL.

Language and Acculturation Benefits

The Deaf and hearing children had different language modalities and other variations in cultural beliefs. On whether deinstitutionalisation was beneficial, considering these differences, two psychologists said:

> Yes, Sign language was only specific to Deaf learners, but now hearing children are exposed to two second languages, namely English and the dominant ZNSL. Children can also share their cultural norms, values, and the rules of the games they play together (LWO 2).

> When they go back home, the hearing children can now communicate with the Deaf and act as ZNSL interpreters (LWO 3).

Deinstitutionalisation exposed hearing children to ZNSL, which they would also teach their family and community members. The spread of ZNSL ultimately benefited the Deaf when they met hearing people who could communicate in ZNSL. When learners have common communication, they may effectively work together socially and academically (Alici, 2018). Therefore, the deinstitutionalisation of the school benefited both the Deaf and the hearing children socially and academically. The working together of Deaf and hearing children brought acceptance of individual differences (Poorman, 1980; Elaldi et al., 2021). Hearing children acquired ZNSL, a language that used to be confined to the Deaf cultural minority group (Elaldi et al., 2021). Both hearing and Deaf children shared cultural norms and values, enabling both parties to settle easily in either hearing or Deaf communities. Another benefit of deinstitutionalisation was the natural acceptance of each other by the learners (UN-CRPD, 2006). Acceptance of individual differences could extend to life outside the school.

Recognition of the Giftedness of Deaf Children

The deinstitutionalisation of the selected school led to recognition of the talents and giftedness of the Deaf children. These talents were unknown

to the people who heard them. They saw them only as service seekers. One of the psychologists revealed that the Deaf children had talents, as shown in the extract below.

> Yes, they have special needs, but 'disability is not an inability'. They have their talents that need nurturing, as do any other child. These talents may be recognised when they learn alongside their hearing counterparts, who may gradually accept them (LWO 1).

Hearing children and teachers in mainstream schools could witness and recognise the abilities of Deaf children. The same scenario occurred for hearing children who were included in reverse inclusion. Although teachers at the mainstream school and hearing children could not readily recognise the abilities of the Deaf children, they got used to it and eventually recognised their (Deaf children) giftedness and potentialities. Teachers would even discover and nurture the talents of the Deaf children.

ZNSL Acquisition and Spread

Sign language was used primarily in institutions by Deaf children and their teachers. Very few people were exposed to ZNSL and knew about it. Deinstitutionalisation exposed hearing children and their communities to ZNSL, as revealed by some of the participants:

> Deinstitutionalisation exposes many people to ZNSL. When deaf children are enrolled in mainstream schools, they maintain their language, that is, ZNSL, their native language. Teachers in mainstream schools learn ZNSL so that they may be able to handle these children. Specialised teachers for the Deaf are also employed to teach Deaf and hearing children in these mainstream schools (LWO 2).

> Our hearing learners are fast picking up [ZNSL]. Even at lunch or break, they are seen mixing well and conversing in ZNSL (Tr).

> We are extremely grateful to learning ZNSL at this school. This enables us to mix well with Deaf people even outside of the school. We even teach people ZNSL in the community (HL).

Deinstitutionalisation led to the acquisition and spread of ZNSL by hearing children in their homes and communities. They taught their families and community members the ZNSL they acquired at their

school. The ZNSL was the main language in the school, hence it was easy for hearing learners to acquire it. Hearing people teaching other hearing people ZNSL was likely to be easy by taking advantage of their common language.

Zimbabwean Sign Language as an Independent Language

ZNSL was used for the teaching and learning of Deaf children and was recognised as one of the sixteen languages in Zimbabwe. On whether ZNSL was taught or examinable as a subject at the school or former institutions for the Deaf, two of the participants presented the following:

> No! It is a language, but it is not examined as a language like Chishona or English. It is used as a tool for teaching and learning. The sign language is mostly English. We don't have Sign language in Shona (LWO 2).

> No, we do not have an examination of ZNSL as a subject, but it is taught for communication purposes (Tr).

Although ZNSL was recognised as one of the 16 official languages in Zimbabwe, the participants unanimously revealed that it was not taught or examined as a subject like other languages. It was taught as a tool for communication in social and academic circles. The curriculum was silent about ZNSL. Specialist teachers in Deaf studies had to modify the curriculum to accommodate ZNSL. English was used in the teaching of ZNSL. Therefore, the Deaf children did not know vernacular words. Although it may sound as if ZNSL was undervalued to be associated with another language, it may not be strange, as it had no writing independent of other languages. Teaching ZNSL as an independent subject was a dream pipeline. Although deinstitutionalisation was decolonising the education of Deaf children in the school, ZNSL remained colonised by hearing.

Discussion

The school had some reasons for deinstitutionalisation. The study found that it was a global call and a government initiative on the reasons for deinstitutionalisation. The global call came through global conventions like UN-CRPD (2006) and organisations like the WFD. Similarly, the government of Zimbabwe came up with pro-deinstitutionalisation pieces

of legislation and policies like the Zimbabwean Constitution (Amendment No. 20) Act (2013) and the National Disability Policy (2021), succeeding the Education Act (1987) and the Disabled Persons Act (1992). In agreement, Dammeyer and Ohna (2021) assert that deinstitutionalisation is influenced by legislation and policies. Despite some of these pieces of legislation having been promulgated more than two decades ago, deinstitutionalisation is a recent phenomenon at the school. This could be due to a lack of monitoring and evaluation of legislation and practice.

In terms of benefits, the study found that deinstitutionalisation led to the recognition of the giftedness and talents of Deaf learners, which led to the nurturing of their potentialities. Furthermore, the study found that hearing learners and hearing people generally accepted Deaf learners due to deinstitutionalisation, primarily based on their gifts and talents. In line with this, the UN-CRPD (2006) views society as viewing disability from a sociocultural perspective, viewing the environment as disabling rather than viewing the disability as existing within an individual. The deinstitutionalisation of Deaf education and acceptance of the Deaf requires changing the mindset of stakeholders and those around the Deaf (Anastasiou et al., 2015; Freedman & Ferri, 2017). In the case of the selected school, stakeholders and those around the Deaf learners, such as policymakers, communities and hearing children, reconstructed their minds toward the Deaf and accepted them (Freedman & Ferri, 2017). Despite reconstructing minds, Poorman (1980), WFD (2018), and Elaldi (2021) view deinstitutionalisation as having some challenges, like a shortage of resources in general and killed personnel, leading to a lack of knowledge on how to implement deinstitutionalisation.

Furthermore, the study found that hearing learners in reverse inclusion acquired ZNSL, spreading the language in different communities. Learning together with the Deaf led the hearing learners to acquire ZNSL. Zimbabwean National Sign Language, through acquisition, could be better than through learning. Despite Powell, Hyde and Punch (2014) pointing out that there may be language preferences between the Deaf and hearing learners, the hearing children quickly adapted to the mainstream language, ZNSL, and started spreading it. To this effect, schools and communities could have efficient hearing ZNSL users, leading to the widespread use of the correct version of ZNSL. The spread of ZNSL in communities led to the acceptance of the Deaf in these communities. However, the study established that ZNSL was not taught as a subject but was just a communication and learning tool.

Furthermore, the study found that during extramural activities, the Deaf and hearing learners had the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships. During this time, the Deaf and hearing learners got accustomed to each other, sharing ideas on various topics of interest, like cultures, likes and dislikes.

After deinstitutionalisation, the selected school remained relevant to the education of the Deaf. In addition to enrolling the Deaf, the school also enrolled hearing learners. Notably, the study found that the school was the best model of deinstitutionalisation in the country. The school had relevant resources for the education of the Deaf. The study established that mainstream schools lacked resources due to poor funding and lack of donations, leaving the selected school the best in providing special educational needs for the Deaf in Harare.

Conclusions

In light of the findings, the researchers made several conclusions. One of the main conclusions was that deinstitutionalisation was a global trend advocated by international conventions, frameworks of action, and the Zimbabwean government aimed at removing or reducing discrimination, segregation, stigmatisation, prejudice and stereotyping of Deaf children.
The study concludes that deinstitutionalisation may be in the form of reverse inclusion. The deinstitutionalisation of the school resulted in hearing children being included, creating a scenario called reverse inclusion. The study also concludes that inclusion did not only refer to Deaf children learning with hearing children, but also to children who were initially excluded by the system. At the selected school, hearing learners were included because the institution initially excluded them.

Deinstitutionalisation had several benefits, such as the acquisition and spread of ZNSL to communities by hearing children. Zimbabwe National Sign Language was the dominant language in the school. Considering this, the study concludes that ZNSL could be acquired by hearing people if it were the dominant language and could connect the Deaf and hearing children in the school and the hearing people beyond the school.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends the following:

The study found that deinstitutionalisation was a clear call from international conventions and the government of Zimbabwe to allow children with hearing loss to have universal education, social life and services. Nevertheless, the general populace had not changed their mindset to embrace deinstitutionalisation. To this effect, the study recommended that the Ministry of Primary Education (MoPSE), through the Learner Welfare Department, advocates for deinstitutionalisation through various stakeholders to ensure that they embrace it before it is practised.

Although deinstitutionalisation has benefits, the study found some hurdles to its implementation. Therefore, the study recommended that MoPSE take an ecological inventory to establish the challenges and resources necessary for deinstitutionalisation and ensure they are addressed before deinstitutionalisation is implemented.

The study also found that ZNSL was not taught as a subject like other languages or included in the curriculum. Therefore, the study recommends that the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) include ZNSL as an independent and examinable language or subject in the curriculum.

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