Rethinking Education of Deaf Children in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities for Teacher Education

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The study explores the communication challenges faced by teacher trainees in teaching deaf learners and the opportunities that they present. A critical disabilities study approach within the qualitative paradigm was employed to collect interview data from 14 trainee teachers (6 were men and 8 women) and 5 of their specialist mentors (all of them were women) at 3 special schools in Zimbabwe. The trainees were aged 28–45. Data were analyzed using theme identification methods. Results showed that all the mentors and trainees without deaf assistants tended to teach using spoken language and even though they had no prior experience with them, they were suspicious of the use of deaf assistants, whom they saw as synonymous with sign language. Scepticism about using sign language was based on the idea that it was inadequate, would interfere with spoken language development, and would not enable learners to be included in a nondeaf world. It was also established that most of the mentors and trainees with deaf assistants used spoken language to teach, although this tended to be in combination with signs. Based on these challenges, opportunities to develop the education of deaf learners are discussed and recommendations made.

Deaf children's educational outcomes are a long-term global challenge. Literature is replete with research studies recording how most deaf high school leavers barely manage to achieve a fourth-grade reading level (Brueggemann, 2004; Wauters, van Bon, & Tellings, 2006) and how their mathematics attainments are lower than those for nondeaf peers (Gregory, 1998; Wood, Wood, Griffiths, & Howarth, 1996). These global low levels of academic achievement are also experienced in the education of deaf children in Zimbabwe, a country that has the double distinction of having a literacy rate of 92%, which is the highest in Africa (United Nations Development Program, 2010) and which Devlieger (1998) reports to be one of the most disability-friendly country on the continent. In Zimbabwe, deaf pupils who make it into high school are the exception rather than the rule. Typically, deaf learners are placed in boarding institutions where they undergo elementary education, after which most of them are taught practical skills such as basketry, woodwork, leatherwork, sewing, and cookery (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2004). Peresuh and Barcham (1998) observed that historically, teaching such children was considered more of a moral and religious obligation than a right as missionaries and humanitarian organizations like the Jairos Jiri Association educated deaf children with no coordination at all.

Teachers of deaf children in that colonial era were typically untrained but nevertheless committed to the improvement of the lot of the deaf (Barcham, 1998). According to Barcham (1998), the few teachers of the deaf who were trained were trained overseas or in South Africa. The majority were expected to learn their craft through practical apprenticeship and to improve through trial and error. This discourse, which appears to view teaching as technically simple, requiring devotion and loyalty in carrying out the directives of one's more knowledgeable superiors, is what Hargreaves (2000) calls "pre-professional" as

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teachers are seen as virtual amateurs. Johnson, Liddell and Erting's (1989:12) seminal paper observed that the education of deaf learners is a field "…populated by dedicated, hardworking and committed individuals, most of whom have made a principled choice to pursue a career of public service." This dedication, hard work, and commitment notwithstanding, the majority of deaf school children still left school after acquiring low-level practical skills in the crafts.

After independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe government began to coordinate and regulate the education of deaf learners (Mpofu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe, & Maunganidze, 2007; Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). In line with what Mpofu et al. (2007) call Zimbabwe's espousal of egalitarian values of equal opportunity for all citizens, provision of education was transformed to include learning the same curriculum and sitting for the same examinations as nondeaf peers, sometimes even in the same mainstream schools, as required by the Chief Education Officer's circular number 3/89 (Ministry of Education & Culture, 1989). Teachers of deaf children began to receive special training, initially at the diploma level at an associate college of the University of Zimbabwe in 1986, and by 1994, the University of Zimbabwe had begun to offer degree programs (Mavundukure & Thembani, 2000; Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). Such arrangements imply that many teachers of deaf children are now specialists with additional training after general teacher education. These changes notwithstanding, deaf children's educational outcomes continue to leave a lot to be desired. Many of them still leave school barely literate and numerate so that most of them still undertake the same low-level craft skills training that deaf learners before them used to receive prior to independence (Musengi & Dakwa, 2011).

One way of looking at the situation in deaf education is to think of the learners as having inherent limitations related to impaired hearing (Chimedza & Mutasa, 2003). This way of thinking is referred to as the clinical perspective (Paul, 2001). Paul (2001) explains that within this perspective, deaf children are described relative to the characteristics of or goals for average-hearing children in mainstream society in order to remedy the deficiencies or improve the skills of deaf children. Deaf children's learning is typically

approached as a problem in which deaf teenagers are performing at the level of 8- or 9-year-old nondeaf children as in literacy (Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003; Wauters et al., 2006) or numeracy studies that find delays of about 3 years between deaf and nondeaf learners (Bull, Marschark, & Blatto-Vallee, 2005; Nunes & Moreno, 2002). Because most deaf children are born into all-hearing, speaking families (Chimedza & Mutasa, 2003; Quigley & Paul, 1994), the language of the home is inaccessible to them. However, nowadays, in a developed country such as the United States, there are well-documented speech-language gains achieved by deaf children who receive intense auditory-based intervention (Dornan, Hickson, Murdoch, & Houston, 2009; Nicholas & Geers, 2006) as early as 2 or 3 months because technology now makes early detection through neonatal screening possible (White, Forsman, Eichwald, & Munoz, 2010). Some studies found that under these conditions, education through an auditory/ oral approach can lead to age-appropriate literacy attainments for deaf children (Geers & Moog, 1989; Lewis, 1996). Crosson and Geers (2001) found that deaf children who are fitted with cochlear implants before the age of 5 years construct narratives that are similar in structure and cohesion to those of nondeaf age-mates by the age of 8 or 9 years. In a developing country such as Zimbabwe however, Musengi (1999) found that detection is considered to be early at 3 or 4 years of age and that amplification and other auditory-based intervention measures are generally only possible upon entry into school at the age of 6 or 7 years. It is usually the case, therefore, that deaf children in Zimbabwe have not developed a sophisticated competence in any language by the time they start school (Musengi & Dakwa, 2011). Johnson et al. (1989) show that upon entering school, such children are already well behind nondeaf age-mates in the acquisition of the knowledge and information expected to be held by children of their age. Marschark (1997) adds that with each subsequent year in school, they would fall further behind nondeaf children, especially if they do not have access to the language used in school. Deaf children in Zimbabwe are not only identified later and receive intervention services only when they begin school, but they also have to leave the only hearing aids they have when they go home on vacation as these costly devices belong to

the school (Musengi, 1999). In this context, specialist teachers of the deaf in such a developing country may think of themselves as limited in what they can do for the learners because of their inherent limitations.

Another way of looking at the situation in deaf education is to think of deafness as a social construct that can therefore be socially deconstructed (Chimedza & Mutasa, 2003). Paul (2001) explains that this cultural perspective views deafness as a natural condition, not a disability to be cured. It is argued that some deaf individuals, as members of a distinct ethnic group, do not want to be like individuals with average hearing as the abilities to speak and hear are not only unrealistic but also undesirable goals for most of them (Paul, 2001). In this cultural perspective, Mittelman and Quinsland (1991) and Lane (1992) argue that research studies that find a significant discrepancy between the academic abilities of deaf and nondeaf students are framed within a medical deficit model where deafness is regarded as a handicap, whereas in the cultural perspective, it would be seen as just another receptive or expressive difference. For example, the cultural perspective argues that deaf people's literacy is typically approached as a problem in much of the literature because literacy itself is usually defined as, and by, the dominant culture's literacy (Brueggemann, 2004). In other words, teaching of and research on literacy may have found deaf people as lacking because such research and teaching have been framed in a pathological understanding of deafness (Brueggemann, 2004). The cultural perspective offers an alternative approach to the learning of deaf students as it does not focus on their deficits but focuses on what they can do—their assets. According to this perspective, deaf people have assets that could be used in their learning in order to enhance their educational outcomes and promote egalitarian values of equal opportunity for all citizens (Paul, 2001). This study intends to explore the conceptualization of deafness that dominates the discourse on the challenges of teaching deaf pupils in Zimbabwe and analyze what opportunities are available not only from the dominant discourse but also from the other, not-so-popular discourse.

Statement of the Problem

Typically, deaf learners in Zimbabwe acquire a primary school education, which they use to undertake training in crafts and other low-level trades as they hardly proceed with further education. The perceived competency of teachers of deaf children and the apparent failure of their pupils are contradictory facts, which inspired this study. Specifically, the study sought to find out how specialist teachers of deaf pupils in special schools approach communication challenges in teaching deaf learners and what opportunities arose from those challenges.

Methodology

Design

This was a project based on the Critical Disabilities Studies and concerned itself with the cultural impact of potential Hearing colonialism and what Meekosha (2008) calls the "hegemonic processes of normalcy." Three special schools that were hosting undergraduate interns from the Special Needs Education Department at Great Zimbabwe University were targeted because the department's main criterion for deploying trainees to these schools was that they were "centers of excellence" in deaf education in Zimbabwe. Emancipation is a cornerstone of critical theory (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009) and so we explored how emancipatory the communication of nondeaf trainee teachers and their nondeaf mentors was as they interacted with deaf learners who were potentially "the colonized." Trainees and their specialist mentors were engaged in mini-focus group discussions to enable collaboration in discussing the challenges involved in teaching deaf children. Kitzinger (1995) argues that such collaboration can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in one-to-one interviews. Because English is the language of instruction in schools and institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, it was anticipated that there would be no problems in using it in these discussions with teachers who are college diploma holders. No language complications arose among these teachers during the focus group discussions.

Participants

Participants in the study were a convenience sample of 14 trainee teachers, 6 of whom were men and 8 women, and 5 of their female mentors at three special

schools. The mentors were specialist teachers of the deaf, whereas the trainees had undergone mainstream teacher education. The latter were in the final year of a specialist 2-year undergraduate special needs education training program and were undergoing internship at the special schools at the time of data collection. Six of the trainee teachers had deaf teacher assistants, whereas the other eight did not. All trainees and mentors were nondeaf adults.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the first author during internship follow-up visits in 2010 and 2011. The researcher organized informal, mini-focus groups in which interns and mentors discussed, and where mentors were not available, interns discussed among themselves. The discussions were audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using theme identification methods. Data collection and analysis were initially done simultaneously as advocated by Marshall and Rossman (1989) in Creswell (2009). After reading through all the data to get a general sense of the information and reflecting on its overall meaning, detailed analysis involving coding was done. Coding involved color coding the transcribed focus group discussion notes on the basis of teachers' approaches to communication in class. Three themes emerged from this process: spoken language as a basis for learning, sign language as facilitating learning, and a combination of spoken and sign languages. These themes are used to organize the results below.

Results

Spoken Language as a Basis for Learning

All the specialist mentors without deaf assistants tended to communicate using spoken language as a basis for teaching and learning. One mentor without a deaf assistant said, "I insist on giving them a firm foundation in spoken English which I then try to use to develop reading and writing skills. Without early intervention programs which develop language early, there is very little we can do when these children come to school without a language."

Another said, "In the early days we are really concrete and activity oriented. I use objects around the class and take them out to do things. All the time I insist on the children talking, either imitating me or some of their friends, rather than pointing and grabbing. When I started teaching these children, I really wanted to make a difference but after a while I realized they had serious limitations which I could not overcome."

Similarly, all the trainee teachers without a deaf assistant also used spoken language as a basis for communicating with their classes. One trainee said, "They need to be taught to use their hearing aids properly in order to benefit fully in classes." Another said, "Deaf children need extra assistance in such areas as speech training and lip-reading." Another said, "They need more time to learn the same things that hearing children learn in shorter periods because of the language problem." However, one of the trainees said, "In college most of what I learnt was how to teach them to speak and to listen to sounds but for many of my pupils this does not appear to succeed. I am sure I need a lot more time to be successful in this."

Two of the trainees with deaf assistants also used spoken language for communicating with their deaf classes. One said, "The deaf adults help me with controlling the class so that the children stay on task and pay attention to me for longer than would otherwise be the case." She further explained, "I was not fluent with the signs I had learnt in college and had to keep referring to the sign language dictionary in order to teach them English." The other explained, "They (deaf assistants) are excellent for controlling the class. They quickly give instructions about changing activities and prodding those who appear to be distracted by other things."

The mentoring specialists' use of speaking could be indicative of a traditional conservatism regarding the use of the language of the hearing community, whereas the trainee specialists' use of spoken language might indicate continuing trends not only in induction training at special schools for the deaf but also in specialist training institutions. The fact that both those with and without deaf assistants tended to use spoken language suggests that most specialist teachers generally approach the teaching of deaf pupils using the oral approach. The mentoring specialists' references to

there being little they can do because of lack of early intervention and deaf children having serious limitations that could not be overcome may indicate teacher burnout. Such misperceptions of deaf children's abilities can be inferred to result in low expectations for the deaf pupils. For at least one of the trainees, the speaking and listening approach is apparently not succeeding, but she puts it down to the need for more time and so appears set to persevere in this approach. However, her alluding to the fact that speaking and listening was the only way she was trained to approach education of deaf pupils may also suggest dissatisfaction or at least doubt about this particular approach.

A mentor without a deaf assistant explained her opposition to the use of deaf assistants thus: "Using Sign Language makes them (deaf pupils) lazy to learn proper English." Another mentor without a deaf assistant said, "Using deaf adults in class would hinder the proper development of spoken language. They themselves cannot speak well." Another said, "Sign Language tends to confuse their learning of spoken languages such as English as they then consistently use wrong grammatical rules." Another added, "Learning Sign Language does not help them to be included in this world which has more hearing and speaking people."

A mentor without a deaf assistant brought in the possibility of disrupting class interactions when deaf assistants were used. He said, "Deaf adults are likely to cut into your lesson and confuse the pupils."

The foregoing shows that all the specialist teachers who stood in firm opposition to the use of deaf assistants had no experience with them and were also firmly opposed to the use of Sign Language as an approach to teaching the deaf pupils. They appeared to fear interference in one of two forms: either Sign Language use would interfere with the learning of spoken language or the deaf assistant would interfere with the processes of the lessons. It can also be inferred from this that the deaf adults were viewed as synonymous with Sign Language use and also that learning a spoken language would facilitate inclusion into the world of hearing, speaking people.

Many other specialists were opposed to the use of deaf assistants and Sign Language on the basis that Sign Language was inadequate as a language. One mentor without a deaf assistant said, "Using Sign Language is okay in the lower grades but once they get to the higher grades, many abstract concepts cannot be signed." Two mentors with deaf assistants concurred. One said, "In the higher grades, the interpreters do seem to struggle with interpreting concepts themselves. They seem to be more effective in the lower grades." The other said, "Some of the signs in the dictionary are even incorrect as the children here did not understand them." A trainee with a deaf assistant said "The signs from the Zimbabwe Sign Language dictionary that I was exposed to in college were very inadequate when I came here to begin to teach. My signing vocabulary was too little and I could not construct meaningful sentences with the few signs I knew." Another mentor at a school without deaf assistants agreed, "Sign Language is alright but the problem comes when it comes to examinations which must now be written."

The reference to difficulties with abstract concepts in the higher grades and examinations would appear to indicate that some of these specialists did not think of Zimbabwe Sign Language as a language in the same way that they thought of spoken languages as languages. However, it is also possible that some of them were referring to the lack of a written form, inadequate development of many academic constructs, or their own insufficient skills in Zimbabwe Sign Language rather than the students' inadequate language. Reference to some of the signs in the dictionary being incorrect may be because each special school for the deaf may have its own peculiar signs, which are not reflected in the national sign language dictionary. Considering that the dictionary (Chimedza, Sithole, & Rinashe, 1999) was written by nondeaf people, some information may have been lost in the writing process and so it might not be accurate enough for native signers. In addition, movement is a key element of sign language, which may not be captured by static dictionaries, therefore limiting their usefulness.

Beyond the explicit opposition to Sign Language expressed through fear of its effects on learning spoken language and doubt of its adequacy for learning and examination, some specialist teachers do not appear to be directly opposed but rather are unaware of how they might utilize the deaf assistants in more meaningful ways related to the development of language. A trainee with a deaf assistant said, "She helps with preparing

teaching media, organizing the learners when they do pair work, or with cleaning up after the lessons."

A mentor with a deaf assistant also said, "I was just assigned the deaf adult as a 'helper' and so I had to decide how to make use of her in my classes. I find her useful for controlling my large class."

These excerpts seem to suggest two things. First, the deaf assistants were thought to be acceptable for the quick communication that was necessary for class control but not for academic transmission of concepts. Second, the role of the deaf assistants was not made clear to the specialist teachers before the assistants were assigned to their classes.

Sign Language as Facilitating Learning

Most trainee specialists and mentoring specialists with deaf assistants used Sign Language as an approach to facilitate learning in their classes. They seemed to take advantage of the availability of a native user of the language to improve their communication with the deaf pupils. One trainee said, "I am more efficient in teaching concepts when the deaf adult is helping me by interpreting." Another said, "I seem to struggle less when there is an interpreter assisting in my lessons." Another said, "Concepts seem to be more easily learnt when the deaf adult is interpreting in my lessons." A mentor concurred, "My class learns better and more quickly when I have a deaf adult interpreting for me."

A trainee with a deaf assistant brought up the idea of changed patterns of interaction among learners when she said, "They (deaf learners) help each other very quickly in class so that they learn quite cooperatively." However, a trainee with a deaf assistant cast doubt on the nature of the changes in interaction when Sign Language was used in class. Commenting on the interaction between the pupils and the assistant she said, "When the deaf adult is interpreting, it is not easy to tell whether the children are actually learning better or whether the interpreter is just providing the children with the answers."

It would appear that the mentor using the deaf assistant for simply prodding distracted pupils is using her in the same way as those opposed to Sign Language. However, beyond this surface employment of the assistant for class control, the mentor seems to give the deaf assistant greater latitude to interact with the pupils using Sign Language as implied by her role of changing activities. In that sense, Sign Language could be considered to be more acceptable in this class than in the other classes. Most of these specialists' acceptance of Sign Language is seen in their acceptance of interpretation from spoken language to Sign Language. Interpretation would occur in an ad hoc manner. For example, when there was a breakdown of communication between the nondeaf teacher and the deaf class, the deaf assistant would be asked to briefly take over the explanation using sign language. This interpretation role of the deaf assistant is questioned by one trainee who suspects that the children might appear to be learning better maybe because the deaf adult is merely providing answers for the children to repeat. This suspicion may be well founded as the deaf adults are not trained professional interpreters. The suspicion may also be misplaced as the trainee lacks facility in Sign Language and therefore may not understand what is being done. The latter possibility may also suggest that the trainee specialist views deaf pupils as incapable of learning as well as hearing peers do. The movement of the deaf adult from helper with class control to interpreter in lessons seems to continue to a wider role as a co-teacher as is apparent in the following excerpts.

A mentor said, "Several times I have had the feeling that the interpreter was actually teaching the same concept in a different way rather than just interpreting for me. At times the result is quite good, but at other times the lesson did not achieve the desired objectives."

Another mentor said, "Sometimes the interpreter does not actually interpret what you would have asked but tends to provide answers to the pupils. So I have to be on the lookout for that."

Another one said, "I had never taught together with someone else before and it was awkward especially at first. Now I appreciate what she does because deaf children can be as naughty as hearing children, especially when they realise that you do not know signs."

A trainee specialist said, "The deaf adult is very helpful as she interprets and controls the class while I am attending to other things. I do not think of her as an interpreter but as an assistant teacher." He elaborated, "Besides not being able to do things that have to do with hearing and speaking, they (deaf pupils) now appear normal to me."

Another one said, "At first teaching these children with a deaf adult observing in my lessons was like having a critical supervisor all the time. It was like I was back in college and my lecturers were supervising or the headmaster had come to assess me. Now I am used to it."

Although all these excerpts suggest the increased role of the deaf assistant as a co-teacher, for some specialists, this role is accepted, but for others, it is something to be wary about. The wariness revolves around mis-teaching. Such mis-teaching could involve providing answers so that the children do not learn by discovery but are spoon-fed rather than challenged to come up with solutions. This is likely to be because the deaf adults are neither trained interpreters nor trained teachers. These interpreters do not have high school diplomas and so it is possible that sometimes they do not understand the concept being taught. However, the role of the deaf adult as someone who can potentially critique a lesson is acknowledged by the specialists' discomfort with an "observer." From this discomfort, it is also apparent that the professionally trained specialists had not been exposed to team teaching before. Also important to note is that the implicit or explicit recognition of deaf adults as knowledgeable appears to be accompanied by acceptance of the deaf pupils as normal.

Combination of Spoken and Sign Languages

Some of the specialist teachers not having the assistance of deaf adults explained that they used both spoken and Sign languages to teach their classes. A trainee without a deaf assistant said, "I try to match signs with written English as soon as I can." He added, "Deafness is a big disadvantage. This is why they require the extra assistance they get from special schools like this one."

Another said, "First they learn the English words and signs for given pictures and objects around the classroom or simple everyday activities or requests. Then I move on to the Shona equivalents of the same." She explained, "Deaf children need greater patience and more repetition with concepts as they more easily forget."

A mentor without a deaf assistant said, "At first I am not fussy whether they sign, gesture or try to speak as all I want is communication. Then gradually I shift toward more and more speaking because this is a

hearing and speaking world into which they must eventually fit."

What is probable in these specialist teachers' use of signs to support spoken languages such as Shona and English is that because the teachers are hearing, they are likely to emphasize the spoken languages in which they are more fluent at the expense of Sign Languages with which they are less familiar. Whether the spoken or sign signals are presented simultaneously or one after the other, the emphasis on the language in which the teacher is fluent is still likely. In any case, using signs in this way would not be the same as using them in a natural Sign Language. What is also apparent is that the deaf pupils are expected to contend with two spoken languages: English for learning curricular content and Shona for communicating at home. Although on the face of it, the last mentor seems to emphasize communication rather than any specific approach, it is apparent that the emphasis is on the spoken language. Also important to note is the apparently low cognitive expectations of the deaf learners who are said to be disadvantaged and so need greater patience and repetition as they forget more easily.

A mentor with a deaf assistant said, "I create a carefully arranged environment with toys, dolls and so on around which we try to communicate using signs and speech. After a few years of realizing that you are not getting through to these children, you do tend to question what you are doing". He added, "There are a few of them who are naturally gifted and will do very well anyway. However, most of them struggle to go beyond basic concrete concepts."

A trainee with a deaf assistant said, "Teaching some signs and linking them to written English helps develop language. Many of them come here without language at all." She added, "They can lip-read if you indicate to them clearly what language you are speaking before you speak to them."

It would seem from the above excerpts that some of these teachers may be frustrated by the approach they use as they consistently do not have success in communicating with the learners. It is also apparent that some of these specialists have what appear to be low expectations for most of the deaf learners. Others also have what appear to be contradictory beliefs about what the deaf learners can do, for example, acknowledging

that they come without a language and at the same time saying if you indicate what language you are using they will be able to lip-read it.

Discussion

The use of spoken languages as an approach to teach deaf pupils may be indicative of what Baumann (2004) calls audism. Audism, which parallels racism and sexism, involves Saussure's historical privileging of sound over sign in what philosopher Jacques Derrida identifies as "phono-centrism." This means that spoken languages such as Shona and English have historically had status over sign languages such as Zimbabwe Sign Language (ZSL) as a result of audism. The lower status of ZSL would be compounded by the fact that ZSL, like other sign languages, has no widely accepted orthography. Teachers in the special schools for the deaf would therefore be conservative regarding the use of the spoken language of the nondeaf community. Even if the teachers were to use some signs to support spoken languages such as Shona and English in simultaneous communication, because the teachers are nondeaf, they are likely to emphasize the spoken languages in which they are more fluent at the expense of Sign Languages with which they are less familiar. For the same reason, in total communication, which is generally taken to mean use of whatever works, the interpretation is likely to be that whatever the teacher is most familiar with will be considered to be working best. Emphasis on the language in which the teacher is fluent is still likely. Johnson et al. (1989) say the use of signs in this way is crypto-oralism where the emphasis on spoken language is hidden but still dominant. A classic instance in which the teachers seem dependent on spoken language in order to buttress their own inability to use sign language is evident in the contradiction of acknowledging that many deaf children come to school without a language and at the same time saying if one clearly indicates what language is being used, they will be able to lip-read it. This is consistent with the reports of Chiswanda (2001) and Musengi and Dakwa (2011), who also found that teachers acknowledged children's lack of language but still insisted on the use of lip-reading in classes.

Kiyaga and Moores (2009:149) report that, in general, teachers of the deaf in sub-Saharan Africa are mostly nondeaf, lack appropriate training, cannot sign, and do not view Sign Language as a complete language. With specific regard to Zimbabwe, Nziramasanga (1999) found that even specialist teachers for the deaf had to be taught ZSL by their pupils before they could teach them. Barcham (1998) reports that in colonial Zimbabwe, teachers of the deaf were trained outside the country in institutions that subscribed to particular communication methods such as oralism or total communication. The trainee specialists' use of spoken language might indicate continuing trends not only in induction training at special schools for the deaf but also in specialist training institutions. This is supported by the observation that both specialists with deaf assistants and those without them tended to use spoken language approaches in the teaching of deaf pupils.

The specialists' reference to there being little they can do because of lack of early intervention and deaf children having serious limitations that could not be overcome may indicate several things, one of which is teacher burnout. Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) explain that burnout consists of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. It would seem that some of these specialist teachers may be frustrated by approaches such as spoken language and a combination of speaking and signing. These approaches are apparently not succeeding as shown by the low reading attainments of deaf learners (Brueggemann, 2004; Wauters et al., 2006) and low mathematics attainments (Gregory, 1998; Wood et al., 1996; Wood, Wood, & Howarth, 1983). It can be inferred that teachers whose pupils have these low achievements and continue to use traditional approaches such as speaking and a combination of speaking and signing are dissatisfied. At the very least, they doubt their deaf pupils or have low expectations for them. The latter is supported by the specialist teachers' belief that deaf children had serious limitations that could not be overcome. Some research suggests that accountability systems can exert a positive influence on pedagogy by motivating teachers to focus on content and try out new pedagogical approaches (Coleman et al., 1997; Porter, 2000). In contrast to countries with a long accountability and testing tradition, such as the United States, Zimbabwe recently commenced school accountability through teacher performance appraisals and public examining of deaf children. It is hoped that

this will have a positive influence and eradicate what Ladd (2003) calls negative attitudes toward people with disabilities, which originate in the clinical model. Some of these beliefs are that they are not full human beings because of the absence of or damage to a physical faculty, which Ladd (2003) calls a form of blaming the victim. In Zimbabwe, deaf people are referred to as *mbeveve* in Shona or *imbebebe* in Ndebele, both of which mean mute. Both terms have concordial agreement with pronouns for nonhumans. Devlieger (1998) found that the terms used to describe people with disabilities in languages such as Shona and Ndebele (*chirema* in Shona and *isilema* in Ndebele) use the prefix for "it," which indicates that people with a disability are perceived as having a thing-like quality that sets them apart from full humans. The morphemes "-*rema*" and "-*lema*" mean being heavy, failing, or lacking competence. The foregoing is supported by the fact that all the specialist teachers who stood in firm opposition to the use of deaf assistants had no experience with them and were also firmly opposed to the use of Sign Language as an approach to teaching the deaf pupils.

Specialist teachers opposed to Sign Language appeared to fear that it would interfere with the learn-ing of spoken language. Sign languages have sometimes been described as resembling pidgins (Woodward, 1973) or creoles (Fischer, 1978). However, no evidence exists for this fear. Research has shown that Sign Languages are fully developed linguistic systems (Siple, 1982), structured as natural languages, although they are unlike English (Lidell, 1984). Contrary to such fears, the theoretical underpinning for using Sign Language and a spoken language is Cummins' (1991) linguistic interdependence model, which argues for the existence of a common proficiency underlying all languages. Mayer and Akamatsu (1999) explain that following from this model, it is argued that deaf children who have a solid L1 foundation in a native Sign Language can use this language to buttress their learning of the majority language in its written form without exposure to the majority language's spoken or manually coded system. Baker (2008) says that the second language is needed for teaching reading and writing skills rather than developing oracy in it. It can also be inferred from this that the deaf adults were viewed as synonymous with Sign Language use and also that learning a spoken language would facilitate inclusion into the world of hearing, speaking people.

Specialist teachers opposed to Sign Language approaches were also opposed to the use of deaf assistants for teaching purposes, although many of them had never had occasion to work with one. Some of them may have been opposed as they were unaware of how they might utilize the deaf adults in more meaningful ways related to the development of language. The role of the deaf assistants in language development may not have been readily apparent. Aylen (2007) notes that, in terms of job title and responsibility, teacher aides have had greater responsibilities during the past 40 years. However, Willems and Willems (2001) observe that teachers often are totally unprepared to organize their assistants in an efficient manner as nothing in their training requires that they know how to organize subordinate employees. Rubie-Davis, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, and Basset (2010) also found that teaching assistants often provided pupils with answers and completed work for them. According to Department for Education and Skills (2002), most teaching requires the expertise of a qualified teacher, but some activities can be done by suitably trained staff without qualified teacher status, provided that they work within a clear system of leadership and supervision provided by the qualified teacher.

Many other specialists were opposed to the use of deaf assistants and Sign Language on the basis that Sign Language was inadequate as a language as shown in the old fears found by Woodward (1973) and Fischer (1978). However, Rubie-Davis et al. (2010) found that although teaching assistants were more informal and familiar with the learners, their explanations were sometimes inaccurate and confusing. The reference to difficulties with abstract concepts in the higher grades and examinations would appear to indicate that some of these specialists did not think of ZSL as a language in the same way that they thought of spoken languages as languages. However, some of them were referring to the lack of a written form, inadequate development of many academic constructs, and insufficient training in ZSL. Reilly and Reilly (2005) point out that sign language is typically acquired by deaf pupils in residential schools to a sophisticated level for communication without a single hour of formal instruction. Rudser (1988) argues that it

is necessary for potential interpreters to know the sign language fully as a naturally occurring, legitimate language and then to learn interpreting skills. A wide range of sign language–interpreter courses, including some at the master's level, are offered in developed countries such as the United States (Napier, 2004), which contrasts with what is observed in developing countries. There is no training for sign language interpreters in Zimbabwe, so deaf adults serve as informal interpreters. The lack of a written form for ZSL is an opportunity to implement a Sign-Bilingual approach based on Cummins' (1991) linguistic interdependence model and Baker's (2008) idea that a solid L1 foundation in a native Sign Language could be used to buttress learning of the majority language in its written form without exposure to the majority language's spoken or manually coded system. The inadequate development challenge appears to be an opportunity for teachers, researchers, and deaf learners to show that ZSL is like all natural languages, capable of growing, borrowing, and expanding based on communicative need. Reference to some of the signs in the ZSL dictionary being incorrect may be true because each special school for the deaf may have its own peculiar signs, which are not reflected in the national sign language dictionary. As with the South African Sign Language (SASL) situation cited by Storbeck et al. (2009), even though ZSL varieties are associated with specific schools for the deaf, frequent mixing of deaf people—for example, in sports—should ensure that the variations become less substantial, perhaps limited only to vocabulary. In any case, such variations would not be strange in a country where the main language spoken by more than 80% of the population, Shona, has more than four regional dialects.

The trainee and mentoring specialists with deaf assistants who used ZSL seemed to find the deaf assistants acceptable for the quick communication that was necessary for class control but not for academic transmission of concepts. They seemed to take advantage of the availability of a native user of the language to improve their communication with the deaf pupils. The changed pattern of interaction in class when deaf assistants were used was not being fully utilized. It would appear that the mentors using the deaf assistants for simply prodding distracted pupils or for quicker communication underutilize

them and have the same thinking as those opposed to Sign Language. Magongwa (2010) says that if they are properly accommodated, these deaf assistants can work in conjunction with hearing educators by signing the content of the lessons to the learners. Movement toward such increased utilization is already seen in the greater latitude given to the deaf assistants to interact with the pupils when changing activities. In that sense, Sign Language could be considered to be more acceptable in these classes than in other classes. In some cases, specialists' acceptance of Sign Language is seen in their acceptance of interpretation from spoken language to Sign Language, even though some suspect that the children might appear to be learning better because the deaf assistant is merely providing answers for them to repeat. This suspicion may be well founded as the deaf adults are neither trained interpreters nor teachers (Magongwa, 2010). The suspicion could also be misplaced as the hearing teachers lack native facility in Sign Language and therefore may not understand what is being done. The latter possibility may also suggest that such teachers view deaf pupils as incapable of learning as well as hearing peers do. The movement of the deaf adult from helper with class control to interpreter in lessons is a widening of role. However, there appears to be a lot of opportunity to widen the role even further so that they become what Aylen (2007) calls co-teachers, and Gregory, Knight, McCracken, Powers, and Watson (1998) emphasize this same position as an essential equality between teachers that is necessary for successful bilingual education.

In order for the deaf adults to become co-teachers who do not mis-teach or spoon-feed pupils with the answers, some form of basic pedagogical training is essential. The challenge here would be that most of them do not qualify to enter teacher education with its stringent requirement of at least a pass in Ordinary-level English Language. This challenge seems to give rise to the opportunity for the government to institute affirmative action in the recruitment of native ZSL users as teacher trainees. Such affirmative action could include hearing people who have native-like competency in ZSL by virtue of having been born of deaf parents. It is also apparent that the professional training of specialist teachers of the deaf would then not only need to include a strong component of ZSL but also

team-teaching skills. This is consistent with position of Gregory et al. (1998) discussed earlier.

It is important to note that the implicit or explicit recognition of deaf adults as knowledgeable appears to be accompanied by acceptance of the deaf pupils as normal. Such an approach deviates from the traditional, deficiency-based clinical perspective of deaf learners being viewed as having inherent limitations related to impaired hearing. It would appear that the challenges facing deaf education today are firmly grounded in the clinical perspective. Its conceptualization of deafness as deficiency seems to lead naturally to a discourse of teaching as an activity most suitable for hearing adults, whose focus is on bringing up deaf children to be as close to normal hearing persons like themselves as possible. The opportunities for taking deaf education out of its current quagmire appear to lie in the asset-based cultural perspective with its acceptance of diversity. The opportunities for engaging the deaf community in the learning of deaf children do, however, come with their own set of challenges as the deaf adult community typically left school with low educational attainments and so cannot be assumed to be ready to take up the responsibility of educating young deaf learners. However, such challenges appear to have relatively easy solutions, for example, training of deaf adults as teaching paraprofessionals as discussed earlier. This would appear to be easier than the current failed attempts to teach deaf children to become hearing people and is consistent with Magongwa's (2010) recommendations for the improvement of deaf education in South Africa. The opportunities for the emotional growth of deaf learners who have positive role models who are deaf like them are immense. Only with such open-mindedness can deaf education have opportunities for viewing deafness as a natural condition simply requiring a cultural diversity-based conceptualization of teaching rather than the dominant discourse of deafness as pathology to be approached from a curative teaching viewpoint. In this way, the formal access to schools that deaf children have could be translated into Morrow's (2007) epistemological access. This is consistent with the cultural perspective (Chimedza & Mutasa, 2003), which sees opportunities to deconstruct deafness through open-minded education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Hearing teachers who are assisted by deaf adults in their classes have more success in their communication with deaf pupils. However, collaboration is not smooth and could be improved. The roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and the deaf aide need to be properly outlined so that interdependency between them improves deaf pupils' learning. The above challenges open the door to various opportunities for training hearing and deaf teachers. Teachers' colleges and universities need to urgently revise teacher training programs so that trainee teachers are taught by native users of Sign Language and are expected to pass proficiency tests in it before being expected to teach. Native users of Sign Language, such as deaf adults and hearing children of deaf parents, may also need to be accorded affirmative action to train as teachers of deaf pupils in order to improve communication in the schools. Deaf teacher assistants need to receive training to make them paraprofessional teachers and interpreters and specialist teachers also need training in team-teaching skills to facilitate better collaboration between them and the deaf assistants. It is recommended that research be carried out on how the interdependency between specialist teachers and deaf aides could be improved. Research should also be carried out on the personal characteristics of successful sign language interpreters so that these can be incorporated into a future interpreters' course. It is also recommended that research be carried out on the linguistic characteristics of Zimbabwe Sign Language to enable its development as a language, which can then be examined in schools. Research also needs to be carried out on how to identify infants who are deaf as early as possible without expensive sophisticated gadgets so that those who might benefit from early intervention may do so.

Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

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