A Reflection on Challenges Faced by Deaf Trainees in Effective Social Interaction in St. Angela Mumias Vocational School, Kakamega, Kenya

by Brenda Mumbua Nzioka
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the challenges deaf trainees face in their social interactions. The study focused on St. Angela Mumias Vocational School for the Deaf, Kakamega County. The study was anchored on the Theory of Mind by David Premack (1978). A case study design was adopted. The study target was 103, including 95 deaf trainees, one principal, and 7 trainers. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 3 trainers and the principal, while simple random sampling was used to select 39 deaf trainees. This study adopted a mixed-methods data collection approach. Questionnaires comprising both open-ended and close-ended questions were used to collect data from the principal and deaf trainees. In contrast, semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect primary data from trainers. Quantitative data was coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21). Descriptive data was represented in the form of mean, median, mode, correlation, frequency distribution tables, graphs, pie charts, and percentages. Qualitative data were coded systematically by hand, analyzed thematically and presented in narrative form. The findings revealed that only 27.8% of deaf trainees interacted with the hearing trainees and they also do not share their problems and secrets. Based on the results, the study recommends that the government, through the Ministry of Education, decentralize sign language training to the villages and community settings to assist in enhancing communication between the Deaf and the hearing.

Keywords: Deaf trainees; hearing peers; challenges; social interaction
INTRODUCTION

Social interaction refers to the dynamic, changing sequence of social actions between individuals (or groups) who modify their actions and reactions due to the actions of their interaction partner(s). (Okutoyi, Edwards, & Mbagaya, 2016). Children with hearing loss may experience lower levels of social inclusion than their typical hearing peers and communication skills may be an influential factor (Constantinescu-Sharpe, Phillips, Davis, Dorman, & Hogan, 2017).

In South Africa, during the 11th International conference for the World Federation of the Deaf (2015), the Deaf education and Deaf community in South Africa was one of the plans. This pointed out some challenges within the deaf trainees, one of them being the inability to integrate into mainstream society after they are done with schooling or training. This is because as deaf children grow, they cannot communicate with their family members. After all, the members don’t know sign language and are also hesitant to learn. At the same time, trainees can also not get to vocational centres because society is not ready for them (Tau, 2015). This limits their social interactions in an inclusive setting because they experience social stigma and prejudice during classroom interactions with peers, playground interactions and out-of-school interactions. Also, with deaf trainees, their levels of social interaction are limited to the time, duration and level of content with the interactions between them, their siblings, their parents, peers and their extended family (Blose & Joseph, 2017). This makes them feel embarrassed and ashamed while communicating with members of their families and peers in public places, with dissatisfaction from some extended family members who label and isolate them. Such unhealthy interactions with the extended family negatively influence their social interactive well-being (Moroe, 2018).

In East Africa, Tanzania, trainees with Hearing Impairment in vocational schools usually feel uncomfortable in the classroom when concentrating on their hearing problem because they want to be like their hearing peers, making them opt not to be part of the class and out of class activities (Weber, 2016). In 2004, the National Policy on Disability was enacted and social protection, non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, and recognition of the HI were some of the tenets (Tungaraza, 2018). These made families with deaf trainees ensure inclusion and take care of them just like any other child and provide the necessary care while interacting with the deaf trainees. Within families, parents (biological parents, primary caregivers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and older siblings) mould their children’s abilities and behaviours as a primary mode of social interaction (Wamoyi, Wight, & Remes, 2015).

Deaf trainees at St. Angela vocational school have mild, moderate, severe and profound degrees of hearing loss. There are also hearing trainees within the institution making it an inclusive setting. This dramatically influences them because the trainees tend to group themselves and create close relationships depending on their various degrees of hearing loss, family backgrounds and levels of communication. As a result, this builds: misunderstanding, poor self-esteem, frustration, fear, unfamiliarity, social isolation, averseness and emotional problems (Hankins, 2015). Low-income family dynamics negatively influence the social life of deaf trainees (Otieno,
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