

Oral History of a Pioneer School for the Deaf in Zimbabwe: A Research-based Report

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ABSTRACT This exploratory study analyses the largely undocumented history of Henry Murray special school for the deaf, a residential school established in 1947 in Zimbabwe. The study explores the extent to which the school strives to meet its original mandate of catering exclusively for deaf learners. To do this the history of the school is captured by interviewing stakeholders such as teachers, parents of deaf children, current and former pupils as well as members of the local community. This results in a documentation of how the school's initial academic, vocational and social ethos, values and goals have changed over the years.

INTRODUCTION

Henry Murray is a special school for the deaf that caters exclusively for learners with hearing impairment ranging from hard of hearing to profound deafness (about 40dB to 90dB+). These more than 200 children are aged from 5 years to 19 years and most of them go through 15 years of education at the school. The history of this first special school for the deaf in Zimbabwe is largely unwritten even though many of the players in the setting up and development of the school are still alive. Established in 1947, the school is still striving to meet its original mandate of catering exclusively for deaf learners. This is an exploratory study by two teachers with a combined total of nearly 40 years experience at this school. The study explores the history of the school by documenting how its initial academic, vocational and social ethos, values and goals have changed over the years.

Background to the Study

In contemporary society children move out of the family into the school in order to master needed skills and competencies. For pupils with hearing impairment the specialists agreed at the Salamanca conference (UNESCO 1994: 25) that "... owing to their particular communication needs they were better served in special institutions". In ethos and values, a special school such as Henry Murray which was established

to cater exclusively for children with hearing loss, has traditionally leaned heavily on what Barnes and Mercer (2005) call the medical, pathological perspective of disability which strives to cure or make up for the disability. Sociologist Talcott Parsons is reported to have argued that the 'normal' state of being in society is good health and therefore sickness and by implication impairments are deviations from 'normality'. In contrast an opposing socio-cultural model has emerged in special education. This model is based on the idea that disability is not a result of impairment but is a direct result of failure by society to take account of the differing needs of disabled people and remove the barriers they encounter (Oliver 2009). In the context of this emerging socio-cultural model of disability and its goal of normalization through inclusion, it has become imperative to identify how stakeholders who have been associated with the school over the years feel about the establishment of the segregated school, developments at the school over the years and the direction it has set itself for the future. Given that the major reasons for the rise of special schools was a concern with quality that could be attained in small exclusive settings, what then is the potential of quality education in a situation where the concern is on integration and inclusion into the mainstream of society?

The concept of 'quality education' is difficult to define, elusive and relative. There appears to be no agreement on what quality education entails (Chisaka and Mavundutse 2006). There is a general consensus though that quality education exists and that although we may

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not be able to define it, we can identify it when we come across it (Doherty 2004). Several authorities have written on indicators of quality education, for example, Singh (2000), Doherty (2004), Riddle (2008), Diem and Brooks (2013), Escardibul and Calero (2013), Chattopadhyay (2014), Chong and Ahmed (2014), Grove and Hussey (2014), Suhonen (2014). A careful examination of these indicators shows that quality education can be described in terms of a school system's internal and external efficiency.

The internal efficiency of a school system refers to how well the internal operations of the school are run. Indicators of the internal efficiency of a school system include, among other things access, performance, a good school environment, quality classroom interactions and diverse curricula. External efficiency refers to the match between what the school does or teaches and the expectations of the outside world. Indicators of external efficiency include the relevance of the education system to the learner and the society (Machingura et al. 2012).

This study was undertaken to find out the perceptions of stakeholders on how these indicators of quality education have shifted, if at all, from an individual, medical or pathological model to a socio-cultural model over the years since the establishment of the special school by the missionaries. This study comes in the wake of the Zimbabwean government's formal requirement that special schools should follow the national curriculum starting from 1989. According to the Chief Education Officer's circular Minute Number 3 (1989) all special schools are required to follow the national curriculum as laid out by the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education. This requirement appears to have had a profound but unexplored effect on the learning environment in the special school for the deaf under study.

The Research Problem

Curricula at a special school such as Henry Murray have been standardized and centralized in order to bring pupils with hearing impairment more in line with hearing peers and make them more competitive on the employment market. However, the most distinctive feature of Special Needs Education is that in order to be responsive to the needs of individual pupils with special needs, programmes have to be individual-

ized. This study intended to analyse stakeholders' perceptions of the continued responsiveness of the special school for the deaf to the social, academic and vocational needs of pupils with hearing impairment over the years. Specifically, the study sought to find out the degree to which stakeholders with firsthand experience of the school perceived the evolution of the identified indicators of internal and external efficiency at the school over the years.

Research Questions

The study sought to address the following questions:

How have indicators of internal efficiency changed in the special school?

How have indicators of external efficiency changed in the special school?

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the researchers used a descriptive case study. A case study was chosen because of its possibility of depth. Huysamen (1994) states that case studies often provide an opportunity for the investigator to develop an insight into basic aspects of human perceptions. In this study, the researchers wanted to gain insight into the perceptions of stakeholders at the special school. This would enable participants to tell their stories face to face and in that process realize their experiences with the school. Welman et al. (2005) posit that in a case study, research is directed at understanding the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity. In this study the researchers wanted to find out the uniqueness of stakeholders' perceptions of developments at the special school as it strives to attain quality in changing social, political and economic environments.

The population of this study was made up of the 26 teachers and two institutional caregivers at Henry Murray School. This group of clinical service providers includes: the boarding master and boarding mistress, the school head; nine university graduates, five of who specialized in the education of children with hearing impairment; nine special education diploma holders and eight primary-trained, non-specialist teachers. The 222 pupils with hearing impairment who are enrolled at the school as well as 11

other ancillary staff members were also part of the population. Four of the 13 ancillary staff members are hearing impaired. The pupils at the school are boys and girls with varying degrees of hearing loss whose ages range from five to 19 years of age. Most of these pupils are at the primary school level while others are at post primary level where they are engaged in vocational training. It also includes former students. It was thought that students and former students would be a rich source of information since they would give the clients' perspective of the quality of service provision.

Members of the community who interact with the school in some ways were also part of the population. This included residents of Morgenster mission where the special is and surrounding villages. In this research, the researcher considered the population from the institutions within the Morgenster Mission, which interacts with the students with hearing impairment. This includes hospital staff where the students with hearing impairment are treated and the church where the hearing impaired students go for Sunday church services. The mission has a resident population estimated at about 500 people.

This qualitative study selected a smaller, cross-section of the population at Henry Murray School for in-depth interviewing and analysis and so employed a non-probability sampling technique. Specifically, snowball sampling was used to select five teachers, four deaf students, and six members of the local community, three one of who are deaf former students of the school. Snowball sampling was used in order to select participants who had a long history with the school. All participants were engaged in in-depth, face to face oral history interviews some of which lasted more than two hours. Deaf participants were interviewed in Zimbabwean Sign Language while all the other participants were interviewed in English.

Permission to collect data was sought and obtained from the Education Secretary of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe which is the responsible authority of Morgenster Mission before appointments were made with stakeholders such as the school-head (principal) and teachers. At the mission, the assistance of workers was sought to identify relevant stakeholders who were knowledgeable about developments at the school. The selected respondents were then interviewed individually during weekends when they were not at work.

Ethical considerations obliged the researchers to inform the interviewees of the nature and purpose of the research study. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic under study, the participants were assured of anonymity in reporting the case study in order to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent was then sought and granted. Participants were also advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were promised access to the final research results.

The qualitative data from the oral history interviews were analyzed using theme identification methods. According to Welman et al. (2005) themes are umbrella constructs which can be identified before, during and after data collection. Systematic content analysis technique was employed to identify themes emerging from data collected using interviews. This method allowed the researchers to examine the intensity with which certain words were used, points of views and emotionally laden words. Items from interviews were transcribed manually. Responses were processed by converting them into write-ups which were edited for accuracy and commented on before theme identification could begin. The emerging themes have been used as sub-headings in the results that follow.

RESULTS

School Entry

All four deaf students remember being brought to the special school by their fathers and explained that they were too young to know why they were being taken to school. All say they were welcomed and oriented into the school by the institutional caregivers (the boarding-master or boarding-mistress). Two female teachers who were interviewed said that they came to the school to join their spouses who were working elsewhere in the Mission. They had not been specially trained when they were deployed to the school. Of the three male teachers, one was deployed to the school as a subject specialist while the other two joined the school initially out of curiosity about how people with hearing impairment learn.

None of these teachers had any training in Special Education when they joined the school. The one teacher who joined the school in the 1960s said he had been oriented by assisting a

more experienced teacher for a term before becoming responsible for his own class. The teachers who joined the school in the 1970s and 1980s said that they were not given any orientation on how to teach pupils with hearing impairment when they arrived at the school. One of the female teachers said, *"I was so frustrated and wanted to go back to a mainstream school but there were no vacancies at the nearest school. I think the lack of orientation was worsened by the fact that I was teaching primary school students who were my age."* Another female teacher said, *"I did not know any Sign Language at all. On my first day many of the pupils signed to me that they wanted to be excused to go to the toilet but because I did not understand, I just refused and carried on teaching. I was only told later by another teacher that the pupils had been politely asking to be excused. I was embarrassed."*

All the teachers, whether they joined the school in the 1960s, 1970s or 1990s said that they did not have any knowledge of Sign Language and had to learn it from other teachers and the pupils themselves. The teachers said that now things had changed as newcomers to the school are first orientated by being attached to a specialist teacher for two to three weeks.

One member of the local community who has known the school since 1949 said it had been started by the missionaries to spread the Christian gospel. He said when the school transferred from Pamushana Mission in Bikita because of water shortages there, it was first accommodated at the regular primary school at Morgenster Mission. He said many people brought their children because of the good reputation of the hospital and the missionaries in general. The first student was one Tendai Moyo from Bikita who had been transferred together with the school when it moved to Morgenster. Soon there were many other children from various places throughout the country.

Curriculum

All three deaf former students who enrolled at the school in the 1970s say that they wrote school-based examinations which they think were more useful and relevant than the public examinations being written now. The language of instruction at that time was Shona which they say they are fairly proficient in. English was not

introduced either as a language of instruction or as a subject. There appears to have been no formal curriculum as they remember spending most of their time in outdoor activities. Length of time spent in each grade depended on one's performance as one of them said he needed 14 years to complete primary education and the other two needed 15 years. The current students said they use Shona and English for learning from the first receptions class. They find Shona particularly difficult. They all learn all the subjects taught in mainstream primary schools and will write the national examination at the end of grade seven. They say that they have spent one year in reception class, four years in grade one, two years each in grade two, three and four. At the time of data collection one of the pupils was in grade five, another was in grade six and the other was in grade seven. The ones in grade six and seven had spent a year each in the previous grade. At this rate the current students were likely to spend a total of 14 years in the primary school.

All the five teachers said that students with hearing impairment are talented in practical subjects, especially Art and Craft. They complained that there were too few practical subjects on offer in the early days but now there were more. However, even with the increased number of practical subjects, they complained that there was a gender bias in the subject allocation as boys had a wider choice than the girls who were restricted to Home Economics and Computers only.

The teachers said that the curriculum was academically oriented. Whereas in the past, students are said to have written school-based examinations, in the 1980s they started writing public, national examinations. Three of the teachers said that because of this, the curriculum had become rather too examination-oriented. They said that they had to rush in order to complete the syllabus at the expense of children's understanding. To compound this problem, they said that too many languages had been introduced to the deaf children. One teacher said, "Children are introduced to English, Shona and Sign Language in the first grade and this confuses the children who have come from home without any language." Another said, "All subjects offered in mainstream schools are now also offered here from grade one except for Music." Another said, "Curriculum differentiation is no longer practiced."

Most of the teachers said that the advent of performance appraisals also hindered individu-

alized curriculum implementation as teachers became more competitive and tried to attain mainstream school norms. One teacher said, “*MaKiRA anotikuvadza nekuti tinotarisirwa kuita sezvinoitwa kuCPS*” (Shona for: Performance appraisals are not good for us as we are compared to those in mainstream schools). They also said that in the past curriculum implementation was more effective because of regular supervision by School Inspectors. Now they said that the inspectors rarely visited the school and were generally not knowledgeable about what goes on within the school.

The hearing member of the community observed that it was good that students were taught Sign Language and practical subjects such as gardening, carpentry, welding and Home Economics. He said that these subjects together with Christianity were introduced a long time ago and were very helpful for the students. He also said that in the past the students only learnt up to Standard 3 (equivalent to grade 5).

Support Services

The former students who first came to school in 1972 and 1974 say that when they first came, food, uniforms and linen were items that were provided for free by the school as they were donations. They did not have to pay school fees, neither were they assessed to determine the level of hearing loss. Specialist teachers would make appropriate referrals for pupils who needed specialist services elsewhere or had been wrongly placed by parents. Current students say that they are assessed for hearing loss before being enrolled into the first grade and their parents have had to provide for all their boarding school needs through the payment of school fees.

All the five teachers said that in the past most of the resources used at the school were donor funded. Non-governmental organizations such as World Vision and Plan International used to be reliable donors to the school. Nowadays donations are scarce and so parents have to support the school’s programs through payment of school fees. It was said that some of the parents try to hide their identities in order to dump their children at the school and avoid paying the fees. Others withdraw their children from the boarding school because they cannot afford to pay. It was said that government was trying to alleviate the parents’ burden by sponsoring chil-

dren through a social welfare programme it calls Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). The teachers said this was not enough to fully fund operations at the school.

The hearing member of the local community said that most of the resources at the school were donated. He said that the various congregations of the church donated to the school. He also cited the building of the new office block and audiometric laboratory as donations from overseas well-wishers.

Transition

All former students said that they never had any transition services whether from home to school or from vocational training to employment. However, the introduction of practical subjects in the upper primary school was seen by the clients as a transition service from primary to vocational skills training programmes.

The teachers said that transition services from home to school would be difficult implement as most of the children came from remote rural areas scattered all over the country. However two of the teachers said that the four years that the children spent doing pre-learning activities at the school is a transition phase which is meant to prepare them for the next two years in grade one. The teachers also said that the three years that students spent learning vocational trades after grade seven were a transitional service in preparation for the world of employment.

Employment

All the male former students said that their vocational skills enabled them to become gainfully employed in the formal sector while the females said that the choice of vocational skills was restricted to Home Economics which had not enabled them to be formally employed. They generally said that formal employment opportunities are scarce but informal employment was very useful for them.

All the five teachers said self-employment was the most viable option for graduates of the vocational skills courses. They also noted that fewer girls than boys tended to become formally employed after school. One teacher said, “The school certificate that they are given after training here is not recognized nationally and therefore restricts employment opportunities.”

The hearing member of the local community said that pupils were well trained in vocational skills for self-employment and very few of them were in formal employment. He attributed the self-employment to the good vocational skills that the students acquired at the school. He said, "My house was built by a former student of this school."

Chores

Former students who left the school in the 1970s and 1980s said that in the past there were different duties for boys and girls but nowadays both undertake the same chores. They said that they undertook a lot of chores within the school which helped them acquire many self-help skills which continued to use today.

Teachers said that older boys and girls were expected to do their own laundry and girls even assist with food preparation when there are functions at the school. Younger boys and girls were expected to sweep their classrooms, clean the toilets, maintain the flowers and water the garden.

The deaf member of the local community said that in the past everything was done for the pupils. He said that there were many people who were employed to work for the children. He said that nowadays the pupils were involved in the sweeping of their classrooms, making flowerbeds, cleaning toilets and so on.

General Welfare

Former students said that food tended to be inadequate and the meals rather monotonous even when donor funded. A current student said that food continued to be inadequate all though there was more variety in the meals.

Two teachers said in the past food eaten by the students was enough and up to a good standard. The other three teachers said that there has always been a shortage of food. One of the teachers was particularly unhappy about how the health problems of students were attended to. She said in the past there had been an active committee which was responsible for noting children's ailments and liaising with medical personnel at the hospital to ease communication problems between them and the deaf patient. She said, "Nowadays that committee only exists on paper but is not functional."

The deaf member of the local community said that during the colonial period when the school had a female head, the pupils were well cared for as there were many people employed to work for them. When the school had male heads, this changed.

Punishment and Discipline

All clients said that corporal punishment was extensively used to good advantage in the early years. Morals from the bible were said to have been used effectively in conjunction with the corporal punishment. They complained that nowadays there are too many warnings without punishment which are ineffective.

All the five teachers said corporal punishment played an important part in ensuring discipline was maintained at the school. They said that at times parents were called to the school in order to assist with their child who would have misbehaved. A few children were said to have been expelled from the school for misconduct that was considered to be gross. Some of the teachers said that corporal punishment had become scarce and so discipline had declined. Many pupils were now being given chores as punishment for misconduct.

The deaf member of the local community said that during the tenure of the female school-head, the students were well disciplined and there was little recourse to punishment. He said that later students had become so ill-disciplined some of them had stolen a pig and slaughtered it for meat during the night. Those students were expelled from school. Corporal punishment had also become prevalent during this time.

Recreation and Leisure

Most of the former students said that in the past recreation had revolved around playing games outdoors. They said that nowadays there were many more outdoor and indoor games that the students take part in. They also said that with improved technology, many of the students now spent a lot of their leisure time watching television.

All the teachers said that boys usually play soccer while girls watch television indoors. The younger girls played with the many toys that were available. It was said that every week the school also has a day for clubs. On this day,

pupils choose whether they want to be in the dance club, modeling club, drama club among many others. The school also has a play centre which younger children can make use of.

The hearing member of the local community said that the boys played soccer while the girls watched television. He says he had observed the children being taken by the boarding master and boarding mistress for walks into the mountains.

Dormitory Experiences

Former male students said that they used to stay in large dormitories in large numbers. They said that there was much theft because their lockers were insecure. They also had ablution facilities outside the dormitories. These former students said that they were happy to see that current students were now staying in smaller units and had toilets and bathrooms inside the dormitories. Bullying was said to be especially prevalent among the boys. Bigger boys tended to send younger boys on errands. There was less bullying among the girls.

The teachers said that in the past there had been a lack of security especially at the girls dormitories which were not securely fenced. They were happy to see that this had been corrected and that now the girls had a live-in boarding mistress.

The hearing member of the local community said that older boys bullied younger boys and that these children tended to live in crowded dormitories. He said that in the past, overcrowding had not been a problem as there were few students and so the accommodation was enough.

DISCUSSION

It was found that teachers appear to be deployed to the school without proper orientation and regardless of the fact that they do not have specialist training in the education of children with hearing impairment and Sign Language. This finding is supported by Nziramasanga (1999) who found that teachers in special schools for the deaf were not proficient in Sign Language and had to be taught the language by students who they were supposed to teach. The school's quality could then be said to be lacking in terms of internal efficiency with regards to school en-

vironment as staff are not appropriately educated and qualified to handle the responsibility of teaching pupils who are deaf.

It was also found that parents brought their deaf children to the school because of the good reputation of the hospital and other missionary work which was being done at the mission. Another associated attraction to the special school was the provision of donations which obviated the need to pay school fees. This is in line with what Barnes and Mercer (2005) call the medical model and charity model beginnings of special education world-wide. Even though initially the school did not have sufficient technology to emphasize audiometric assessments and fitting with hearing aids, still the medical model emphasis was trying to alleviate the perceived deficiency of not hearing. The legacy of the charitable approach in which resources were largely donor-funded appears to be evident in such practices as trying to abandon deaf children at the school or not paying school fees for them. This is in contrast to the sociological or cultural model whose emphasis would be on empowerment of clients so that they are not passive recipients of service provision.

It was found that the previously used school-based examinations and a flexible, locally designed curriculum are thought to have been more useful and relevant than the current public examinations and national curriculum that are being used now. According to Machingura et al.'s (2012) criteria the special school seems to have had greater internal efficiency with regards to the performance of the learners as they attained high levels of achievement in various areas of the curriculum. Diem and Brooks (2013) would seem to concur that because of the good pass rates at that time, the quality of education then was higher than the quality that is being offered now when the emphasis is on a national curriculum that they rush through and public examinations in which they do not do well. The quality in the past could also be said to have been superior as length of time spent in each grade depended on one's performance and there was flexible curriculum differentiation. Individualisation does distinguish special needs education from general education. Spending one year in reception class, 4 years in grade one, grade two to four, 2 years then grade five to seven a year in each grade in a predetermined fashion seems not to subscribe to the principle of individual-

ization of instruction. Similarly, the advent of performance appraisals also hinders individualized curriculum implementation as teachers became more competitive rather than collaborative as they try to attain unattainable mainstream school norms.

In the past the language of instruction was Shona and there was no other language which was introduced as it was feared that additional languages would confuse the learners. The current practice of introducing English, Shona and Sign Language to these children who come from home without a language is equally feared to be confusing them. Such a persistent fear is not supported by the current literature on multilingual education. According to Cummins' (2006) interdependency theory of bilingual acquisition, one language can be used to learn another without detracting from the first or second language. Such a position would appear to support the current use of Shona, English and Sign Language for learning in the special school. However, the concurrent use of all three languages right from the reception class may not be vindicated by interdependency theory which assumes that one language would be acquired first in order for it to be used to learn a second and even a third language.

It was found that students with hearing impairment now learn all the subjects taught in the mainstream and this would appear to be in line with the basic principles of normalization which espouses the provision of services that as near normal as possible (UNESCO 1994). However, the decided bias towards practical subjects, especially Art and Craft would seem to belie the underlying charity model of service provision. In this model, the deaf learners are inferior objects of pity who can only learn concrete concepts such as those in practical subjects from which they are expected to earn a basic living in future. The thinking is that they would have extreme difficulty with abstract academic subjects. However, the fallacy of such thinking is evident when it is taken into account that the same teachers who think the deaf learners are inferior academically are themselves not proficient in a language that the latter might more easily access: Sign Language.

However, even the practical subjects that are on offer at the school seem to have been gender-stereotyped with boys taking on the masculine subjects such as woodwork and metalwork

and the girls being allocated the feminine Cookery and Fashion and Fabrics. In this regard the school would appear to be practicing sexism and unacceptable sex role divisions which restrict the choices of both boys and girls. It is not surprising therefore that boys had better chances of formal employment than girls. In another Zimbabwean study, Gordon (1998) found that teachers and parents have different expectations of and attitudes towards girls and boys and that the beliefs of these children closely mirror those of their parents and teachers. The vocational training courses on offer are more like crafts which do not assist learners to become formally employed as the qualification obtained after training is not recognized nationally. According to Chimedza and Petersen (2003), deaf students received insufficient vocational counseling and placement services. The training does not provide the students with the necessary competitive skills. Self employment is the major opportunity for school-leavers. These findings are in agreement with studies carried out in the United States that unemployment of deaf adults was four times that of some of non-disabled peers.

Outsiders such as the hearing member of the local community thought that students were taught Sign Language whereas insiders such as the teachers were aware that they themselves were not proficient enough in Sign Language to teach it. By extrapolation it might not be far-fetched to think that School Inspectors, who would be outsiders, may be unaware of this teacher deficiency and therefore refrain from supervising the special school. However, even with these shortcomings, the highest academic class at the school has moved from standard 3 (equivalent to grade 5) in the past, to the current grade 7.

It was also found that most of the resources used at this school were donor-funded. This school was founded on principles of Christian charity. Dyk (2009) asserts that faith based organizations reach out to the most vulnerable people. However service delivery becomes one of charity where students have no rights to demand services and are denied their self determination.

Another finding was that students at the school spent the first three years in pre-learning and only begin grade one in the fourth year. According to Chiswanda (2001) students with hearing impairment at special schools spend

longer time in these primary schools. The finding that some parents used the school as a dumping ground might be due to poverty or negative attitudes by the parents. Another finding was that students may not receive appropriate health care since they have communication problems and are no longer accompanied to the hospital by someone knowledgeable in sign language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the standardization and centralization of the curriculum, it can be concluded that the education of pupils with hearing impairment has been brought more into line with hearing peers. However this has not helped to make them any more competitive on the employment market as the emphasis on gender-biased vocational training continues. The standardized curriculum has meant a more socio-cultural focus which seems to still exist alongside aspects of the previous charity and medical ethos of the school. In other words, although the school has moved to address the social, academic and vocational needs of pupils, it has not gone far enough to embrace Deaf culture as evident not only in the non-availability of Deaf teachers but also in the absence of Sign Language from the official curriculum. This means that even though the indicators of internal efficiency have moved to include more subjects and examinations these changes still tend to want to turn the deaf children into hearing people as far as possible. As a direct result of this, employment on the job market which is an important indicator of external efficiency remains largely unchanged. Overall, it would appear that even though the school has incorporated aspects of a socio-cultural perspective this has not been radical enough to effect noticeable changes as compared to the colonial era in which the medical and charitable perspectives were dominant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following could be done to improve the quality of education at the special school:

- ♦ The staffing office at the ministry of education should only deploy specially trained teachers to a special school such as this one;
- ♦ Administration at the school should invite the Zimbabwe National Association of the

Deaf (ZIMNAD) to conduct workshops to facilitate proficiency in sign language among specialist teachers whose training may have lacked that component;

- ♦ Members of the inspectorate at the ministry of education should be knowledgeable on Special Needs Education in general and Sign Language in particular in order to properly supervise activities at the school;
- ♦ Since not all pupils can successfully write public examinations, school-based criterion referenced tests should be re-introduced by the school;
- ♦ The government through the Zimbabwe schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) should use sign language to examine those pupils who will have been taught through sign language in order to improve their pass rate at grade seven;
- ♦ The school should allow individual teachers flexibility in choosing either Zimbabwe Sign Language, English, Shona or Ndebele as medium of instruction for specific learners who have unique needs and backgrounds;
- ♦ The special school should ensure that choice of vocational courses is gender balanced and that vocational courses offered are topical and in demand on the job market. This could be done by conducting needs assessments before embarking on vocational training.
- ♦ The school should embark on a programme of counseling which would include sex education to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about prevention of HIV and AIDS.
- ♦ The responsible authority should also establish a secondary school unit at the school in order to increase pupils' opportunities for further education.

It is also recommended another study which involves all special schools for the deaf in the country be carried out in order to find out similarities and differences in approach and what can be learned from these.

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