

## **Influence of Verbal Communication on Academic Performance of Learners with Hearing Impairment in Inclusive Settings in Migori County, Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to establish the influence of verbal communication on academic performance of learners with hearing impairment (HI) in inclusive settings in Migori County. The study was anchored on the Total Communication Theory by Holcomb of (1967). Descriptive survey design was employed in this study. The targeted population consisted of 10 head-teachers, 80 teachers and 90 learners in primary schools in inclusive settings in Migori County. The study sampled 10 head-teachers, 66 teachers and 73 learners who were selected using proportionate simple random sampling procedure. The data was collected using semi structured teachers and learners questionnaires head teachers interview guide and learners observation checklist. A reliability coefficient of 0.8 was ascertained using the split half method indicating that learners' and teachers' questionnaires were reliable. Content validity of the three data collection instruments were ascertained by presenting them to various research experts in the content area whose advice was in-cooperated. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Qualitative data was arranged thematically in line with research objectives. The study found that all the sampled schools were in dire need of various communication modes. Most teachers were found to be poor in sign language which was leading to poor academic performance. Majority of hearing impaired learners in class five scored lower marks than their class means score. The study's formulated hypothesis was tested at 95% confident level using multi regression analysis. The result showed that 73.3% of the variations in academic performance of hearing impaired learners were attributed to independent variables. The study also revealed that TC was mostly used as the instructional mode. Further results showed that the availability of Kenyan Sign Language made the most significant contribution in the performance of learners with HI. The study recommended a joint effort between the government, educational stakeholders and agencies working with persons with disabilities to support inclusiveschools with the necessary facilities.

**KEYWORDS:** *Verbal Communication, Academic Performance, Learners with Hearing Impairment and Inclusive Settings*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Close to 250 million persons in the world suffer or are affected in one way or another by hearing impairment and more than 75% of this number are found in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Mapolisa, 2013). World educators have developed two main instructional methods (oral and manual methods) of educating learners with hearing impairment whose applications vary globally depending on the nature and functions of the individual institutions. These instructional methods aim at ensuring that such learners are accorded the opportunity that enables them to compete favorably with the average learners (Mitchell, 2014).

The degree of hearing loss in children vary from a slight loss to severe cases according to Beastley (2016), cases of severe hearing loss are referred to as hearing impairment while those with slight hearing problems are called hard of hearing. Loss of hearing in most cases are associated with hearing problems which begins at childhood stages and if not taken care of may affect their writing and reading resulting in poor academic development (Cole&Flexer, 2011). A study conducted by Cole and Flexer (2011) in USA on 1,218 children with mild hearing loss indicated that 37 percent had failed a grade. The study further showed that children with unilateral hearing loss are ten times more likely than normally hearing children to fail a grade. The

larger majority of children with hearing loss are hard of hearing rather than hearing impaired. For these children, their speech may be audible but not intelligible enough to allow them to hear one word as distinct from another.

In the United States alone, there are over 50,000 school-age hearing impaired children and close to 5 million children are who in schools suffering from hard of hearing cases (Wolffe & Jerry, 2010). According to Bat-Chava and Yael (2012), hearing impairment cases in Australia vary with age and sex. The most notable cases are found among boys than girls aged 0-14 years. They further indicated that about three quarter of boys and almost half of the girls aged 5-14 years have had hearing cases. Among the children with hearing impairment, 15% - 30% have been reported to have communication difficulties (Varshney, 2016).

Learners with HI experience communication difficulties and the use of various communication modes in inclusion schools is desirable. The use of various communication modes including verbal, manual and Total Communication (TC) have been praised among HI (Heinrichs-Graham & Lewis, 2012). According to Varshney (2016), hearing impairment has led to learning difficulties in most schools in India since 15% - 30% of children with hearing impairment had been reported to experience communication difficulties. Such difficulties call for professional interventions in planning and provision of safe and supportive environment that helps in developing communication skills. Professionals in this case are the teachers who are regrettably not well trained in sign language.

Marschark et al., (2002) in Thailand too saw the need for systematic process in total communication and made a policy in total communication in 2009 by the Thailand Office of the Basic Education Commission. The main objective of the policy was to promote Positive attitude and decrease truancy problems in schools. This was to promote the learner academic and social being in the inclusive classroom. However, this did not focus on learners with hearing impairment.

Lack of resources has slowed down awareness on hearing impairment problem in Nigeria, Egypt and other African Countries but Ekwama (2003) study indicated that such cases are believed to be high among the African population. Children with special needs are usually neglected and often than not lack basic necessity they require such as hearing aids, leaving the school administrations' to shoulder the whole burden in case they are taken to schools. In a study in Egypt by Gad-Allah (2015) found out that there exists communication breakdown among learners who suffer from hearing impairment, than their normal counter parts and most teachers in regular schools. This is mainly due to lack of necessary skills in sign languages to enable effective communication (Marques, 2015; Olusanya, 2014).

More changes in educational system are continuously witnessed in Kenya with focus on education of the hearing impaired and hard-of-hearing. Several organizations in Kenya are championing the rights of hearing impaired and promoting the progress in hearing impaired education (Adoyo, 2007). The development of Kenyan sign language has in the past influenced sign languages in other parts of the world; for instance that of Somalia was founded based on the Kenyan sign language. The Kenyan sign language varies with the rest of the world but this variation is not very big with that of Tanzania and Uganda (Wamae, Getrude & Kamau 2004).

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

According to Kothari (2011), research design is a plan that a researcher uses to answer questions posted by the research problem. Thus forming the skeleton (conceptual structure) within which the research is to be carried out, detailing the data collection process and analysis. The researcher adopted descriptive survey design to explore the influence of communication on determining the academic performance of Learners with hearing impairment. Descriptive survey design refers to a systematic investigation on a phenomenon in which the researcher does not have the right of manipulating the data on the variables under investigation (Orodho & Okombo, 2002). This design allowed the researcher to collect the information on people's attitudes, opinions, and habits or on social issue through interviews and questionnaires by use of a sample population (Kerlinger, 1973). This design appealed for the researcher based on its simplicity and it also enabled the researcher to carry out the study without manipulating the data.

## **III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Verbal Communication and Academic Performance of Learners with HI**

The first objective of the study was to determine the influence of verbal communication on academic performance of learners with HI. To realize this, the researcher asked learners and teachers to give their opinion regarding this in relation to the use of verbal communication, and the extent of use of verbal communication in critical areas in school. The data was analyzed in frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations (S.D). Tables, pie-charts and graphs were used in presenting the results. To maintain the anonymity of the head teachers as part of ethical considerations in qualitative data analysis from the head teachers interviews, the 10 head teachers interviewed were identified in this study as head-teacher<sub>1</sub>, head-teacher<sub>2</sub>, head-teachers<sub>3</sub>, .....head-teacher<sub>10</sub>.

The researchers requested the respondents (learners and teachers) with the help of likert scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements in line with the use of the various verbal communication methods. Likert scale were provided to the respondents in which the questionnaire responses were coded with Strongly agree rated 5, Agree-4, Undecided-3, Disagree – 2 and Strongly disagree-1. The findings are shown in Table 4.9.

**Table 1: Use of Various Verbal Communication Methods**

| Statement  |        | SA         | A          | U          | D        | SD         | Mean        | S.D  |
|--|--------|------------|------------|------------|----------|------------|-------------|------|
| Teachers use lip-reading as a mode verbal communication in our school  | F<br>% | 50<br>38.7 | 45<br>34.9 | 20<br>15.5 | 8<br>6.2 | 6<br>4.7   | 3.97        | 0.10 |
| Application of facial expression by teachers enhances academic performance of pupils in our school           | F<br>% | 8<br>6.2   | 64<br>49.6 | 41<br>31.8 | 0<br>0.0 | 16<br>12.4 | 3.50        | 0.07 |
| Verbal communication allows for teacher-learner interaction in our school                                    | F<br>% | 38<br>29.5 | 60<br>46.5 | 24<br>18.6 | 7<br>5.4 | 0<br>0.0   | 4.00        | 0.07 |
| Verbal communication has enabled pupils to understand speech and use it in their communication in our school | F<br>% | 43<br>33.3 | 40<br>31.0 | 33<br>25.6 | 8<br>6.2 | 5<br>3.9   | 3.84        | 0.10 |
| <b>Overall aggregated mean</b>   |        |            |            |            |          |            | <b>3.83</b> |      |

From Table 1, 38.7% (50) of the repondents who participated in this study strongly agreed and 34.9% (45) of the respondents agreed that there is evidents of the use of lip-reading as a mode of communication in there respective schoolls. 15.5% (20 in total) of the respondents were undecided, 6.2% (8) disagreed while 4.7% (6) strongly disagreed with the statement the teachers use lip-reading as a form of verbal communication mode in school. This study generally revealed that 73.6% (95) of the repondents agreed that teachers use lip-reading as a mode of verbal communication (mean = 3.97; SD = 0.10), only 15.5% (20) could not ascertain (undecided) the use of lip-readiding while partly 4.7% (6) disagreed on the statement.

Qualitative data obtained from head teacher affirmed the use of lip-reading as a form of verbal communication as indicated by two of the head teachers that:

We emphasize the use of lip-reading in our school..... This is especially encouraged in classes which have learners with HI. (Head-teacher<sub>1</sub>).

My school has some learners who have nearly lost their hearing ability, but the use of lip-reading has been instrumental in keeping such learners in school. Such learners can lip-read well and I encourage my teachers to assist them to further develop their lip-reading..... (Head-teacher<sub>2</sub>).

Similarly, 6.2% (8) of the repondents strongly agreed and 49.6% (64) agreed with the statement that: “Application of facial expression by teachers enhances academic performance of pupils in our school”. 31.8% (41) were undecided and only 12.4% (16) strongly disagreed with the statement. The study generally revealed an overwhelming agreement (mean = 3.50, SD = 0.07).29.5% (38) of the repondents further strongly agreed and 46.5% (60) agreed with the statement that ‘Verbal communication allows for teacher – learner interaction...’ 18.6% (24) of the respondent were undecided while 5.4% (7) disagreed with the statement.

The importance of verbal communication in teacher-learner interaction got majority endorsement with a mean of 4.00 and SD of 0.07. This result indicated that due to the use of verbal communication, learners with HI enjoyed a good relationship (interaction) with their teachers which were necessary for them in realizing good academic performance. Finally, the statement that ‘Verbal communication has enabled pupils to understand speech and use it in their communication in our school’ drew 33.3% (43) of the respondents strongly agreeing and 31.0% (40) agreeing as opposed to 25.6% (33) of the respondents who undecided while 6.2% (8) disagreeing and 3.9% (5) strongly disagreeing with the statement. Evidently, majority of the respondents as shown by those who agreed (83 in total forming 64.3%, a mean of 3.84 and SD of 0.10) affirmed the importance of verbal communication in speech development among learners in school.

Qualitative data from the head teachers agreed with this finding. It was asserted by three different head teachers that:

The use of verbal communication within the school has enabled good speech development among learners in school irrespective of the learner’s backgrouground or even hearing ability..... Head-teacher<sub>3,4&5</sub>).

This excerpt acknowledges that both the teachers and learners in the schools had adopted the use of verbal communication and they generally make use of it in their daily interactions within the school.

The findings of this study were in agreement with that of Ademokoya (1996) who asserted that the most popular communication mode among teachers in an inclusive setting is lip-reading and facial expression. Ademokoya further adds that verbal communication generally is a widely adopted communication mode used for instruction purposes and learning mostly occur through the spoken language. Even though the use of speech is the most popular mode of communication (Muiti, 2010), the study revealed that learners with HI were not comfortable with the use of verbal communication.

The study further sought to assess the extent to which verbal communication was needed by learners in various critical areas in schools. The results as indicated by learners are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Extent of Need of Verbal Communication in Critical Areas in School**

| Statement                 |   | Very highly needed | Highly needed | Moderately needed | Not needed |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------|
| Academic issues           | F | 29                 | 33            | 0                 | 6          |
|                           | % | 42.6               | 48.5          | 0.0               | 8.8        |
| Social interaction issues | F | 19                 | 22            | 27                | 0          |
|                           | % | 27.9               | 32.4          | 39.7              | 0.0        |
| Vocational issues         | F | 14                 | 26            | 19                | 9          |
|                           | % | 20.6               | 38.2          | 27.9              | 13.2       |
| Discipline issues         | F | 29                 | 7             | 22                | 10         |
|                           | % | 42.6               | 10.3          | 32.4              | 14.7       |
| Adhering to school rules  | F | 7                  | 44            | 17                | 0          |
|                           | % | 10.3               | 64.7          | 25.0              | 0.0        |
| Career choice issues      | F | 16                 | 6             | 34                | 12         |
|                           | % | 23.5               | 8.8           | 50.0              | 17.6       |
| Sports and games issues   | F | 22                 | 26            | 15                | 5          |
|                           | % | 32.4               | 38.2          | 22.1              | 7.4        |

Table 2 shows that majority (91.1%) of learners were of the opinion that verbal communication was highly needed in areas related to academics. Similarly, 58.8% indicated that they highly needed verbal communication in vocational issues. In discipline related issues, 52.9% of the learners indicated that they highly needed verbal communication. More than 70.0% of the respondents indicated that they highly needed verbal communication when it came to adherence to school rules. Majority of the respondents were either not sure (50.0%) or felt that verbal communication was not needed (17.6%) in issues concerning career choice. More than 60.0% felt that verbal communication was highly needed in areas related to sports and games.

Overall, response indicated that verbal communication had a lot of bearing on various critical areas in school (academic issues, social interaction issues, vocational issues, discipline issues, adherence to school rules, career choice and in sports and games). This could be the reason for poor academic performance among learners with HI since the respondents acknowledged the need of verbal communication on issues related to academics (Table 4.10).

Qualitative data from the head teachers affirmed these findings. One of the head teachers acknowledged that:

Verbal communication is generally an easy mode of communication. We generally employ the use of verbal communication mode in almost all areas in school; be it academics, socializing..... (Head-teacher<sub>6</sub>).

The excerpt above reveals the importance of verbal communication in academic performance of learners with hearing impairment. It is regrettable that such an important communication mode (verbal communication) is not popular among the learners with HI.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive schools in Migori County employ the use of verbal communication in classroom and it is key in speech development among learners. Learners with HI in these schools rely in the use of lip-reading and facial expression. The use of verbal communication is highly praised in areas related to: academics, social interaction, discipline, and sports and games. The use of verbal communication has a positive influence on the academic performance of learners with hearing impairment.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Kenya through its educational programmes should provide a common course to all teacher trainees that intend to deal with 'handling learners with HI' especially in the use of various communication modes.

The study found out that most teachers were not comfortable with the use of manual communication mode and whenever it was used, it had a negative impact on the academic performance of learners with HI due to communication breakdown. The study therefore recommends that the government of Kenya through the ministry of education should organize and conduct in-service trainings for all teachers in primary schools with inclusive settings in the use of manual communication mode.

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