

Impact of Resources on the Teaching and Learning of English Language of Learners with Visual Impairment at 'O' Level in an Inclusive Set-Up: The Case of Musimeki High School

F. MLAMBO

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of resources on the teaching and learning of English Language of learners with visual impairment at the 'O' Level in an inclusive set-up. It identifies various strategies that can be employed to improve the performance of learners with visual impairment in the English Language. The paper adopted the qualitative approach. Fifteen (15) learners and four (4) teachers were purposively selected because these were the participants with the required information for the study. It is envisaged that the present study will benefit schoolteachers, learners, researchers, policymakers, and administrators among other inclusive education stakeholders individuals, and institutions in Zimbabwe. Thematic data analysis was used in this study. Findings from this paper revealed that there is a shortage of teaching and learning resources from Musimeki High schools (pseudo name) which include Braille books, Braille computers, tape recorders, audiobooks, and DVDs. Supplementary reading materials in Braille, such as novels, magazines, and newspapers are also not available. Inclusivity has an advantage in that sighted learners read for the VI on printed books since there are no Braille books and on computers, since schools do not have computers with jaws software. Not only that but the sighted also assisted during group work tasks since they have access to supplementary reading materials. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe is recommended to liaise with press organisations so that information in newspapers and magazines is brailled. Alternatively, press organisations can employ VI school leavers without jobs to do braille work for them. Other researchers should research further on teacher competency in the teaching of VI learners.

Keywords: visually impaired, resources, braille, inclusivity, software

Background

There is general literature that is blended in the teaching and learning of learners with Visually Impairment. This paper explores the impact of resources on the teaching and learning of the English Language at the 'O' Level in an inclusive set-up in Zimbabwe. The researcher is interested in exploring this area because she is also Visually Impaired. Most of the studies focusing on the impact of resources on the teaching and learning of learners, in general, have tended to ignore learners with visual impairment, thereby leaving a gap that needs to be filled in this area. This study is, therefore, expected to make a valuable contribution to the research by filling in this gap and serving as a future reference to many similar studies. The researcher, therefore, found it worth conducting the study.

Several countries have adopted inclusive education. Special schools remain a service delivery option because of the nature and severity of exceptionality that can be decisive. The need for inclusive education was promoted from the idea of safeguarding the rights of students with disabilities who were previously violated. The prominence given to inclusive education by the Jomtien Framework (1990), the Salamanca Conference (1994), the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1994), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1989), and the United Nations Standard Rules (1993) has thrust equalisation of opportunities onto the centre stage. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) (2007) posits that the philosophy of inclusive education is

rooted in the principle that humans have equal value.

Dakwa (2014) posits that assistive devices to support the inclusion of both blind children and those with low vision were inadequate. Items that broke down could not be repaired owing to a lack of repair kits. Madungwe (2013) also carried out a research study at Masocha High School, on how Mathematics should be taught to VI learners. She highlights that the books were enough for each learner to have his or her textbook, but all the books were in print. This meant that the VI learners could not use them unless they had special equipment to read the texts. The equipment was found to be highly inadequate to cater to all since the textbooks were not transcribed into Braille. This saw the VI learners, to this very day, having difficulties in conceptualising most things that take place in the sighted world, for example, mountains, burning fire, and pictures that they cannot visualise.

Musimeki High School is a Zimbabwean secondary school located in Masvingo Province. The school offers Ordinary and Advanced Level studies and has boarding facilities. Musimeki High School is also a school that respects and recognises the welfare of learners who live with visual impairment because it offers inclusive education. The school employed a specialist teacher who runs the resource centre. The responsibility of the specialist teacher is to transcribe the work of the learners they have written from Braille to print so that the regular teachers will be able to mark the work.

Literature review

Chimedza (2007), cited in Mahanya (2016), highlights that inclusive education in Zimbabwe was officially launched on 22 March 1997, but, upon its launch, there was a lack of resources. Therefore, this study sought to find out the impact of resources on the teaching and learning of the English Language of learners with visual impairment at the 'O' Level in an inclusive set-up. A synthesis of this research shows that there is a gap between recommended practices and reality in the implementation of inclusive education. The American Foundation for the Blind (2012) states that inclusive education is widely practised in developing countries but with few resources to support it. The National Blind Council Society (NBCS) (2008) found out that the current situation in Zimbabwe is that students with disabilities in inclusive education are not provided with necessary support services. This implies that students with disabilities in inclusive education, especially those with visual impairment, do not have enough human and financial support services to make them benefit from it. Despite the teaching and learning of learners who are blind in mainstream classrooms, research is continuously revealing that they are performing dismally in the English Language at the 'O' Level. Ryan (2002) posits that visually impaired students fail in their studies because they have limited resources. These two authors also say visually impaired students have no access to different kinds of reading materials, especially primary sources (Braille books). Frampton (1999) and Procter (1990) who based their studies on South African students, also highlighted that VI students cannot access important information from newspapers and magazines because they are not printed in Braille. The current study seeks to find out to what extent learning resources affect the learning of the English Language by VI learners at 'O' Level in Zimbabwe at the selected school. For someone to pass the English Language, there must be the provision of supplementary reading material.

Research on the international scene indicates that learners are performing dismally in the English Language at the 'O' level. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) and the Zimbabwe Education Act (1987) suggest that a shortage of materials can affect one's education. This position is reinforced by

Nyoni, Marashe, and Nyoni (2011) when they say “the act lacks clarity on education for the disabled and hence it had been taken as a charity issue, and not as a right. It resulted in a situation where there is inadequate provision of equipment and materials for Special Needs Education”.

According to the Nziramasanga Commission’s findings of 1999, there is inadequate provision of equipment and materials for special needs education. Therefore, if inclusive education is fully implemented, VI learners would get assistance from their sighted colleagues since there is a lack of reading material in Braille. For any meaningful learning to take place in any teaching and learning situation, learning materials must be available and accessible to the learners.

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether the VI learners at the selected school have adequate materials such as Braille machines, frames, slates, and stylus to write their work, computers with software Joes (talks) pot-sate readers to scan set books and comprehension texts to perform well in their English Language studies. Another issue is teaching strategies or pedagogy. Teachers who teach at a special school, in a resource centre, or inclusive school, should be equipped with multi-sensory approaches as a way of compensating for the lost senses.

Chimhenga (2016) suggests, in a study on Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe, that the main objective of an education system is to provide quality education for all learners to enable them to realise their full potential and thereby fully contribute to, and participate in, society. Inclusive education promotes a single system of education dedicated to ensuring that all learners are empowered to become caring and competent citizens in an inclusive, changing, and diverse society (Prinsloo, 2001, p. 344). Therefore, VI students have a right to education.

Lowenfield (1983), Korir (2015), and Bishop (1971) in Mwakyeja (2013) also point out that a lack of Braille books can be a cause of a high failure rate. This is highlighted by their studies which were based on Kenyan and British visually impaired students. These books also include English textbooks and as Lowenfield (1983) highlights, “course books and supplementary books are not adequate and even set books for students are not available”. Bishop (1971), cited in Mwakyeja (2013) and Lowenfield (1983), cited in Korir (2015), is also of the view that inaccessible learning materials (Braille books) can also lead to a situation where students become spectators and teachers act like dictators. This is because most books are written in ink, including other learning aids. Without sight at all or with very little residual sight, the visually impaired cannot access learning and, therefore, cannot study on their own. While the above research was carried out in Britain and Kenya, this study was conducted in Zimbabwe and sought to find out if learners with VI at Musimeki High School have adequate Braille books to allow for a smooth learning process. The Africa Forum Proceedings (1994) also alludes to the idea of shortage of materials in Braille, for example, newspapers and magazines, as a cause of failure in VI learners in an inclusive set-up. Hence, the study seeks to find out whether this problem of lack of materials as established by different authors is also faced by learners at Musimeki High School.

In English Language, punctuation marks, such as full stops and capital letters, are very important when reading and writing. According to Kapp (2012), the majority of Braille books have wrong spellings and the dots may be very faint, which makes it difficult for VI learners to read and understand properly what is in the books. Kapp highlights that dot six, which is a sign for a capital letter, is not found in many books, thereby making it a big problem for VI learners during lessons since they do not know

when and where capital letters apply. Kapp (2012) found out that a lot of Braille books have a lot of mistakes, so the current researcher wanted to find out whether Braille books used by learners at Musimeki High School may be sources of errors for the learners as highlighted by Kapp (2012).

Reading Braille with fingers is slow, thereby limiting the amount of information that one can read at a time and this reduces the amount of knowledge one acquires. This is pointed out by Kapp (2012, p. 104) who goes on to say, "Touch reading is slower than visual reading and it limits visually impaired students in the variety and quantity of reading material that is available". Since Braille reading is time-consuming, the researcher wanted to find out if this contributes to the failure of English at Musimeki High School.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) states that to guarantee equal opportunities to all students, the accessibility of ICT educational tools is worldwide considered a major issue because all countries in the world are now well versed in modern technology. Nowadays, VI learners can take advantage of many effective assistive technologies but, while using electronic material for learning purposes, they often encounter several different accessibility and usability problems. For example, VI learners need to use computer machines that are user-friendly to access information like correct spelling, good construction of sentences, correctly punctuated work, good paragraphs, and correctly defined words. Therefore, the researcher wanted to find out whether the students at Musimeki High School have access to the machines which have the NVDA software (Non-visual Desktop Access).

Nkomo (2015) postulates that for effective learning to take place, a conducive environment must be created in the form of basic facilities. Some of these are classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sports fields. Implementation of the English Language curriculum is heavily influenced by the existing teaching and learning materials. Thus, the quality of the resource materials such as charts, maps, textbooks, syllabuses, class libraries, and general classroom appearance significantly affects the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation. Franklin and Biber (1980), cited in Hendricks (2014), posit that since learning is an active process and knowledge is constructed rather than acquired, the students, in this case, the VI students, must be provided with an environment that furthers their own natural tendency to cut with objects, to explore, to manipulate and to experiment. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the importance attached to material resources by teachers at Musimeki High School in English Second Language development. According to Velloza (2019), VI learners are constantly challenged by classroom instructional strategies. Although they can easily listen to lectures and discussions, it can be difficult for them to access class syllabi, textbooks, overhead projector transparencies, power point presentations, maps, written exams, demonstrations, DVDs, videos, and films. Powerpoint presentations, videos, and films are very important in the learning situation because they empower learners with vocabulary, spelling, and sentence construction.

Methodology

This research adopted the case study research design. The qualitative method was employed in which the interview and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The researcher used purposive sampling for both teachers and learners from Musimeki High School because these were the participants with the required information. The researcher used interviews and focus group discussions for the paper to be purely qualitative. 15 learners and 4 teachers constituted participants

for the study.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study.

Effects of lack of resources on learning

The researcher used one school and 15 learners with the codes from SFMS46 to SMMS60. All the 15 interviewed learners from SFMS46 to SMMS60 from Musimeki High School said that lack of resources affects performance and if reading materials are not available yield results that are below the expected standard. The 15 learners from SFMS46 to SMMS60 from the school went on to say if learners are not interacting with the text, spelling will be problematic and as a result, they will score low marks, especially in composition writing. Out of the 15 interviewed learners, 10 indicated that lack of resources affects performance because studying and revision are limited. The same learners asserted that lack of resources affects performance negatively because VI learners depend on the teacher and other learners who are short-sighted for reading comprehension passages and novels. The performance will be below standard, and work cannot be done in time because one needs to look for someone to read for her or him. They would not be able to write correct spellings and since Braille texts are not available, it will be difficult to read during examination hence, performance will be dismal. Learners SFMS 49, SMMS53, and SMMS58 commented that lack of resources affected them negatively because if texts are not available one would have problems in spelling, grammar, and use of punctuation marks and this could result in poor performance. SFMS49 complained:

“It’s not always that I grasp everything that is taught during the lesson for example punctuation during a punctuation lesson, but I can learn best through experience by observing what is written in the texts, so my colleagues and teachers reading for me means I lack experience and exposure, as a result, I would not perform well.”

According to learners SMMS51, lack of resources affected them negatively because wide reading is needed for an individual to perform well.

Learner SMMS51 also affirmed that:

“Our teacher always encourages us to do a wide reading which she always says that it improves our vocabulary, sentence construction, and comprehension but we the VI learners are disadvantaged in that we do not have these textbooks in Braille for wide reading.”

Four learners SFMS47, SMMS51, SMMS54, and SMMS59 said that they are short-sighted, and as a result, they could not see well on the board and chalk affected their sight. When there are no adequate resources in the school like computers and textbooks there will be nowhere to research more information and word meanings.

Availability of texts and supplementary reading materials for self-empowerment

With special reference to this paper, four teachers with codes TFMS13 to TMMS16 were involved in focused group discussions. Musimeki High School faced challenges as far as texts are concerned. Teachers TFMS13-TMMS16 showed that they did not have supplementary reading materials for learners’ self-empowerment.

TFMS14 indicated that one of the challenges was the inadequacy of Braille books and other learning materials. Another challenge was that VI learners not getting enough information when the demonstration was being done on the chalkboard. This means that VI learners are disadvantaged when teachers use the chalkboard. There was a shortage of Braille textbooks for the new curriculum. The textbooks changed time and again since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2015. TMMS16 said that there was also a shortage of tape-recorded texts. Another challenge faced was that there was the inaccessibility of visual media and resource constraints which in turn led to VI learners being disadvantaged. TFMS13 indicated that there was also a shortage of enlarged print novels and dictionaries and of Braille diagrams which are easily understood by VI learners.

Discussion of findings

Semi-structured interviews were administered to the 15 learners and focus group discussions were administered to four teachers at the selected school. The interviewed participants indicated that there is a shortage of learning resources in the selected school. The thrust of this paper was to find out the impact of the lack of resources in the teaching and learning of VI learners in the English Language at the 'O' level in an inclusive setup. The 15 interviewed learners from Musimeki High School stated that a lack of resources hindered their success in their academic work. These materials or resources include Braille books especially those in the new curriculum which was introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in 2015. The majority of the learners and teachers who participated in this study said that Braille books are a challenge at their school. An analysis of the selected school inventory showed that there are few English language textbooks which is a challenge to learners. The finding of this paper concurs with the finding of Wandera, Kabanja, and Mugagga (2017), in their study of challenges encountered by VI learners, when they established that lack of Braille textbooks to be read by VI students is the main challenge faced by these students. Ryan (2002) also established that "VI students fail in their studies because they have limited resources." The findings of this present research are in line with the findings by Dobree, Frampton, and Procter (1999) in South Africa, which also highlighted that VI students cannot access important information from newspapers and magazines because they are not printed in Braille. Hence, for someone to pass the English Language, there must be the provision of reading material. This automatically contributes to failure in the English language when examination time comes. This is because most books are written in ink including other learning aids like charts and work cards as evidenced by the findings of this research on the impact of resources in the teaching and learning of English Language of VI learners at 'O' Level in an inclusive set-up. Bishop (2004) is also of the view that inaccessible learning materials (Braille books) can also lead to a situation where students become spectators and teachers act like dictators. The views of Bishop (2004) are in line with the findings of this current paper on the effects encountered in an inclusive setup where learners indicated that some teachers do not give special attention to the VI learners as they are fast and use the chalkboard or visual media which the VI learners cannot see, and teachers proceed explaining forgetting that there are VI learners. As a result, VI learners will lag and end up as spectators.

The current paper also revealed that Braille sensors and computers with Braille Embossers were scarce and unavailable while Braille machines such as Perkins Braille machines were not enough as indicated by the learners from the selected school. Two of the learners, SFMM 49 and SMMM59, commented that:

"There are no Braille sensors which help us go on internet and computers which are user

friendly (with Jaws) are not enough.” [SIC].

Computers help them to research more information on the internet. The findings of this current study on the non-availability of learning resources concur with the findings of Fuller et al (2004) cited in Wandera et al. (2017), who established that there is a lack of suitable computer programs in universities which can be used by VI students. Kumani (2005) observes that there are Braille pads that make it easier for reading and writing while teachers can use Duxbury software in which the Braille script is converted into form and vice versa. Some of the teachers and learners who were interviewed revealed that there were no tape recorders at the school. Teacher TMMS16 said that “There is a shortage of tape-recorded texts, inaccessibility of visual media, and resource constraints which in turn lead to VI learners being disadvantaged”. TMMS15 revealed that there are no audiobooks at the school.

Conclusions

The major challenge which came out of this paper was the lack of Braille English textbooks and supplementary Braille reading materials such as novels and magazines. This was spelled out by teachers and learners of the selected who revealed their sentiments on this issue. This stands to reason that every text is read for them either by teachers or their colleagues. Some learners tend to fail to comprehend and as a result, fail to follow the plot of the story hence leading to dismal performance in their examinations. For these VI learners to succeed in their examination, there is a need to avail Braille books for their study just like their sighted counterparts. Bishop (2017) supports this claim saying, “All textbooks should be brailled and each school should have a Braille library”.

The other point is that the English Language requires wide reading and, therefore, it is crucial for the VI learners to access information from newspapers and magazines as a way of empowering them. From the study, it is evident that VI learners have no access to newspapers since they are not in Braille. As a result, this can contribute to their failure in the English language since they need to write good compositions. Kirthy (2016) established that there are very few Braille magazines and newspapers for blind children and by not being able to access Brailled newspapers and magazines, VI learners will not be at par with their sighted counterparts. This is because they will not be conversant with critical issues and debates published in the media (newspapers and magazines). The Africa Forum Proceedings (1994) also supports the idea of a shortage of materials in Braille for example newspapers and magazines as a cause of failure in VI learners.

The current study revealed that one of the challenges faced by VI learners in the learning English language is the shortage of teaching and learning materials. The learners indicated that inadequate devices for use hinder their capabilities. The researcher also found that the schools do not have tape recorders, tapes, and DVDs which learners can use to tape information when teachers are conducting lessons. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Culture is recommended to liaise with press organisations so that devices such as newspapers and magazines are brailled. Press organisations are encouraged to employ brailists to do Braille for them especially VI school leavers without jobs. Large print textbooks and dictionaries should be made more available. The National Braille Printing Press should be informed to print new books in time. This implies that teachers who aspire to teach VI learners are encouraged to acquire special education qualifications. There should be more specialists (teachers who specialized in teaching VI learners, who can read and write Braille) in schools.

On the same note, teachers should be staff developed on how to read Braille

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About the Author

Dr. Farisai Mlambo is a Lecturer who teaches Children's Literature, Poetry, Literary Theories and Criticism, English education studies, and Introduction to grammar in the Department of Teacher Development in the English unit at Great Zimbabwe University. She holds Masters of Languages (English) obtained from Great Zimbabwe University. Dr. F Mlambo attained her Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy in Education) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Her research areas maintain the English areas and inclusive issues since this is one of her interesting areas. Dr. Mlambo has an interest in Writing about Inclusive issues because she is visually impaired, also like paralympic games in the area of athletics, drama coaching, and public speaking. She supervises research around English Unit. She is a reviewer of the Journal of Afrifuture and the national examiner of the English Language at O' Level, she is also a member of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.