

TEACHERS' USE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF DAILY LIVING ACTIVITIES BY LEARNERS WITH DEAFBLINDNESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Historians and educationists globally have described deafblindness by examining its roots in the fields of blindness, deafness and multiple disabilities (Hart, 2006). Scholars describe deafblindness as a unique field because it tries to meet the complex communication and programming needs of individuals with very diverse conditions. The purpose of the study was to establish the teachers' use of communication techniques that enable learners with deafblindness achieve life skills during Activities of Daily Living (ADL) in primary schools in Uganda. The study focused on two government-aided primary schools from Eastern and Mid-western regions of Uganda. This paper presents findings obtained through a descriptive survey research design with a sample size of 32 participants. Purposive sampling approach was used to identify study sites and participants. The results were analyzed descriptively using a triangulation approach according to categories and emerging sub-themes. The study concluded that teachers of learners with deafblindness were not doing well in the area of communication development to effectively support learners to achieve life skills during ADLs. Teachers should be trained in communication techniques to cater for indoor and outdoor ADLs, they should also be encouraged to carry out exploratory visits to schools of similar settings to share their experiences. Government should allocate funding and procure adequate and adapted teaching and learning materials. Uganda National Curriculum Development Centre should be flexible in curricula adaptations and reviews. Through this approach, accommodation of learners with multisensory impairments can be achieved. The study suggests that educational training institutions should develop tailor-made programs to equip teachers with necessary skills to support learners with deafblindness. Stake holders working with multisensory teams alongside schools should be trained further. Assessment of learners with deafblindness in the area of communication should be offered timely in order to provide early intervention measures.

Key words: *Learners with Deafblindness, Communication Techniques, Activities of Daily living*

Introduction

According to demographic studies, Deaf blindness can be acquired or be congenital in nature (Stuart, 2002). Learners, born deafblind, are referred to as congenital deafblind, while those who acquire it later in time are referred to as adventitious deafblind. Deafblindness is also referred to as

a Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI) (Stuart, 2000). Accordingly, various studies on deafblindness assume it to be a unique field because it relies upon practices from the aforementioned disciplines to meet the complex communication and programming needs of individuals with very diverse multisensory conditions. However, beyond its formation from multiple bases of knowledge, the field of deafblindness has developed some unique characteristics which extend beyond its parent fields. The outstanding characteristic is communication. Stuart (2002) defines Deafblindness as a functional diagnosis that combines both visual and hearing disabilities. He further notes that the impairment restricts learners' abilities and their full participation during activities of daily living. It requires that the society compensate such learners by way of providing specific services and environmental modifications. Hart (2006) further adds that all persons with congenital deafblindness are potential communicators with their partners. The key issue here is how we can help such learners achieve the desired full potentials.

The effects of deafblindness are diverse and each community faces different challenges. Deafblindness affects a person's ability to live an independent life. The lack of communication potentials disables the person the more. The occurrence of deafblindness varies depending on the degree and time of its onset. It has a serious effect on the individual's ability to achieve the desired life skills. The impairment has equally a serious influence on the quality of life of learners with deafblindness both in schools and in their communities (Bohrman, 2007).

The development and use of communication techniques among learners with deafblindness are often viewed as a complicated process by stakeholders working in that area. According to the International Development Education Agency (IDEA) in the United States of America, deafblindness is viewed as the concomitant hearing and visual impairments. The combination causes such severe communication, developmental and associated education problems. As a result, the individual cannot be accommodated in programs solely for persons who are deaf or blind (IDEA, 2004). The role of the teacher is emphasized as one of the key element of 'transferring' knowledge from the world to the deafblind learner. A period between 1950s and 1980s, saw efforts to foster communication becoming increasingly based on emotional bonding and related interactive routines. Hart (2006) points out various methods of teaching persons with deafblindness to communicate in a way consistent to the hearing and sighted people. Reference is made to a renowned deafblind lady Helen Keller, from the United States of America in early 1880s who was first isolated by those around her because of their inability to comprehend her sense of humor. However, Biesecke, (2005) documented that; the teaching of persons with deafblind is believed to have started in the early 1906 when the first home of persons with deafblindness was established. Despite the varying accounts on the evolution of deafblind education, the teaching of persons with deafblindness has since spread in most countries in Europe and in African continent. Each country faces its own challenges.

The National Consortium on deafblindness, in the United States of America, estimates over 10,000 children with deafblindness. However, Turkington and Sussman (2000) suggested a different figure of 56,000 (NCDB, 2008). In France, specialized services are provided to cater for persons with deafblindness of all ages with an estimate of 3 - 6 out of 100,000 who are deafblind. Cote & Clouteir, (2005) reported that in Quebec City, the provision of such services to learners with deafblindness still remains a big challenge due to communication difficulties encountered by service providers. Available statistics from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) indicate that about 182,350 children with disabilities are enrolled in schools. However, there is no specific

mention of the numbers of learners with deafblindness. There is no clear mention of the kind of training offered to teachers in this area. Van Dijk (2003) notes that by contrast, individuals who are congenitally deafblind are hearing and visually impaired from birth (or soon thereafter). Severe infections in early childhood can cause similar deficits and bring similar implications which apply for those affected from birth. The opportunities for acquiring communication skills are severely limited for this group. Forms of communication techniques include for example; finger spelling, hand-over-hand guidance, hand-under-hand guidance, adapted signing like tactile communication, block writing in the palm, the Lorm signing system and coactive signing. Body signing and key word signing techniques are recommended and encouraged in most schools in the Scandinavian countries such as in Denmark (Rowland & Scheweigert, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the teachers' use of communication techniques in relation to achievement of daily living activities by learners with deafblindness in primary schools in Uganda.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- i. Establish the communication techniques used by teachers to enable them develop communication skills among learners with congenital and adventitious deafblindness during activities of daily living in primary schools
- ii. Establish the influence of teacher - pupils ratio on the acquisition of activities of daily living by learners with congenital and adventitious deafblindness in primary schools
- iii. Analyze the challenges encountered by teachers working with learners with congenital and acquired deafblindness during in-door and out-door activities of daily living in primary schools

Theoretical Framework

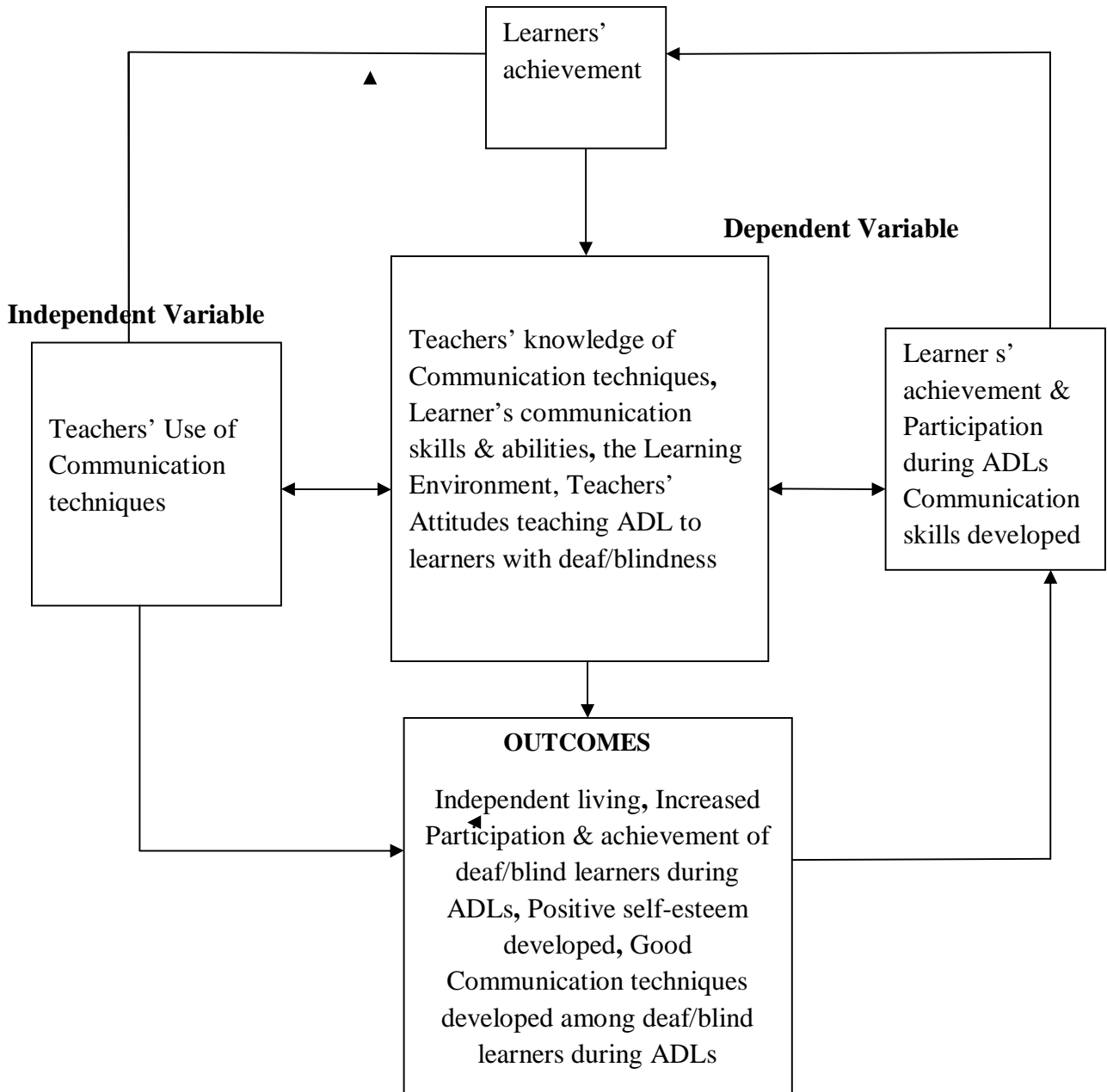
The theories of Social Interaction (Markova, 2008) and the theory of Language and Communication (Bloom & Lahey, 1997) guided the study. Bloom & Lahey identified one aspect of *dialogicality* as a form of a dialogue which is characterized by human cognition and communication. The theory of social interaction states that *dialogism* is a theoretical understanding of knowledge with regard to the method used for its validity and scope in human science. The concept of *dialogue* is concerned with a special type of interaction among human beings in exploring a subject of discussion. However, critiques of Markova and his colleagues base their argument on the fact that learners with deafblindness have a variety of communication modes which they referred to as total communication. Markova (2008) further observed that *dialogicality* is an important fundamental capacity of the mind for those realities to be defined, in terms of otherness.

These theories are indicative of the core characteristics of the emergence of social interaction/communication as: a) Mutual attention and co-regulation; b) reciprocity; c) turn-taking & turn giving; d) Mutual attention and proximity; e) rhythm and tempo; and f) novelty and processing (Janssen & Rodbroe, 2007). This assumption is linked to a study by Sourau (1999) on secondary inter-subjectivity, where the learner becomes capable of organizing his or her relationship with the teacher or an adult with the outside world. Souriau's argument is compounded by the facts presented by Trevarthen (1998) who explains that the child begins to realize that, besides his/her subjective motives, other persons around him too have intentions and motives. He termed this as triadic interaction. According to Bloom & Lahey (1997) communication is a process

of social interaction between the individual, the other and the external environment (i.e. ME, YOU & IT). The theories further note that one’s culture; lifestyle and history influences the person’s interaction with the world around him/her. Both theories further focus on language development; its form, content/structure and context in which language is formulated.

The conceptual framework

Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework on Teachers’ Use of Communication Techniques during Activities of Daily Living



Source: (Researcher’s interpretations from the Literature Reviewed)

on the development and use of communication techniques during ADLs. Teachers were not exposed to various communication techniques. The existing ones used were of questionable value. There was lack of supplementary teaching and learning materials adapted for learners with deafblindness.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study used a descriptive survey design with mixed method approaches. The design was preferred because it permits the description and explanation of a phenomenon under investigation through interviews and observations. It helped the researcher understand the daily life and attachment that people give to their lives and lives of those who are viewed differently in their communities (Gall, 2003). The real life context of teachers and learners with deafblindness was given attention with regard to the teachers' use of communication techniques. Observations included learners' achievement of daily living activities. The design was preferred because it demonstrated an in-depth understanding of informative opinions and observable behaviors from a small representative population of a large number of teachers. The choice of a survey and mixed method gave the researcher and participants good reasons to present their perspectives in their natural environments, using wide ranging enquiries (Yin, 2003).

Location of the Study

The study was carried out in two government-aided primary schools, in Iganga and Masaka districts in eastern and mid-western regions of Uganda. Both schools were boarding schools. School A was located in Iganga district in eastern region approximately 91 kilometers from Kampala city. The school was founded in 1967 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The section for learners with deafblindness was established in 1993. School B is 100 kilometers from Kampala and established in 2009 by the Catholic Church. Both schools served as model centers for Educational Assessment and Resource Services programs (EARS) in the area of Special Needs Education and Deafblindness.

Sampling Procedures

The study adopted purposive and convenient sampling procedures to identify study sites and participants. Purposive sampling procedure is supported by Tongco (2007) who postulates that the approach helps a researcher interface with a selection of participants deemed to have experience in the area of study. The selection of teachers was done after the head teachers presented to the researcher the teaching staff lists specific for those teachers supporting learners with deafblindness. The head teachers and significant others (non teaching staff and parents) provided secondary data. They were briefed on the objectives of the study before the actual study commenced.

Sample Size

The sample size comprised of 32 participants (05 teachers from School **B** and 03 teachers from School **A**). Six (6) learners with deafblindness from School **B** and four (04) learners from School **A** were closely observed during ADLs. Twelve (12) parents provided additional data by way of home visits. Two (02) head teachers (01 from School **B** and 01 from School **A** were interviewed.

Instruments of the Study

The study instruments included a set of semi structured interview guides, observations and focus group discussion guides that helped obtain information from the teachers, head teachers, and parents of the learners with deafblindness. Interviews and observations were done by way of video and audio tape recording activities of daily living and participants' responses. Informal interactions were conducted with the Deaf teachers and other non-teaching staff who had interacted with the learners. They were also requested to give additional pedagogical information like communication/teaching methods used. The instruments helped identify communication techniques and the challenges encountered by the teachers. Care was taken to start the interviews by first building rapport, trust and confidence with participants before administering instruments.

Data collection Procedures

Nomination of participants was done after the researcher was provided with the list of all the teaching staff and their teaching profiles. In addition, secondary data was sought by analyzing the available school records on the teachers' educational levels and experiences. It was important to establish the school sources of funding, the foundation bodies and how their work was related to the aspect of communication development. Learners with deafblindness were identified through analysis of their progress reports. Data collection methods involved, field observations and interview of teachers during segmented ADLs. Planned individual interviews were done on agreed dates. Interviews and observations of ADLs were video recorded during planned indoor and outdoor activities. Research assistants helped during video recording and taking still pictures while the researcher did the audio tape recordings. Consent was sought from the participants. Participants were requested to observe and listen to the recorded videos and voices to confirm their participation and responses. The researcher knew how to use Sign language and tactile communication an added advantage to understand wide ranging of issues related to communication techniques observed. Coded themes and information from focus groups discussions were interpreted in the end to aid data analysis. Ethical issues were considered during the process of data collection procedures.

Findings of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the teachers' use of communication techniques for achievement of daily living activities by learners with deafblindness in primary schools in Uganda. The study finding revealed that teachers relied on the short trainings from local non-governmental organizations that offered refresher courses in the area of deafblindness, which had less focus on communication development. It had no proper linkage to any adaptations on the school curriculum in teacher training institutions and universities where teachers had attended. Although the teachers had served in the schools for many years (ranging between 7 – 20 years), their potentials to develop communication were still wanting. The implication is that the learners' levels of achievement can lag behind if appropriate intervention is not provided.

On the issue focusing on the communication techniques that were more appealing to the teachers to use during their instruction of ADL, use of real objects and objects of reference were the most common techniques used. The study found out that it was necessary to identify some of the different communication techniques used by teachers such as Uganda sign language, gestures, tactile, Lorm, Braille, real objects, Tadoma techniques and objects of reference. It was evident from the observations that the levels of children's mastery and the use of sign language variations had an

impact on the flow of communication during ADLs. The study findings revealed that most learners relied on imitation, and the use of real objects and objects of reference to communicate with the teachers during daily living activities in the schools.

The second objective was to establish the influence of teacher-pupil-ratio on the acquisition of activities of daily living by learners with congenital and adventitious deafblindness in primary schools. Findings from video analysis on the teachers' interactions with the learners during ADL revealed that the teacher-to-pupil ratio was still low and was not appropriate to instruct all segmented activities of daily living. The teacher-to-pupil ratio from both schools ranged between 1:3 to 1:6. Due to the fact that some learners had multisensory impairments, it was challenging to instruct ADLs on one-to-one basis as the case should be for deafblind learners. The teachers used team teaching as one of the alternative intervention strategies to minimize the challenge of limited teachers-to-pupil ratio. Another finding revealed that little content was covered due to the time wasted on one learner. For example, learners with severe vision and hearing needed more attention during ADL and yet the time allocation on the school time table was not adequate. Teachers were overloaded with lots of tasks to accomplish.

The third objective was to analyze the challenges encountered by teachers working with learners with congenital and acquired deafblindness during in-door and out-door activities of daily living in primary schools. The findings indicated that the information teachers had learnt about deafblindness from the short trainings and workshops provided by SENSE international Uganda development program, Swedish Handicap International Agency (SHIA), Sight Savers and Perkins institute of the blind from the United States of America was not adequate to help them attain fluency to communicate in sign language, Braille and tactile. The interpretation was that most approaches lacked relevance to the Uganda context. The teachers also lacked adaptation skills to the Ugandan context since teachers had limited sign language and tactile communication skills. Most learners had multisensory impairments and this meant that it was challenging for the teachers to interpret what the learners meant when giving them feedback.

The study findings also revealed that the challenge teachers faced was to teach and re-teach learners the same content for a long time and yet some of them dropped out of school. Those who later reported back in the next school term took time to master the previous content. Yet another challenge experienced was that parents withdrew their learners from school due to the nonpayment of school fees. The study also found out that most parents were not willing to support their learners in terms of providing scholastic materials. This challenge concurs with a similar study among parents in Ghana by Afufu (2004) on the reluctance of parents to offer support to such learners.

Another finding revealed that teachers faced the challenge of managing learners who had reached adolescence stage. For example, teaching toileting and personal hygiene especially to the girls during their menstrual cycles was challenging. Some learners were observed as being hyperactive and non cooperative during ADLs

should be enhanced. The parent Ministry of Education and Sports, Science & Technology should liaise with the district education officers in all the regions to identify willing teachers for further training in the area of deafblindness and in particular communication. There is need for governments of Uganda to adhere to quality assurance. Schools that receive support from other stakeholders in terms of training are closely monitored and supervised. This ensures compliance to the methodology to deliver an agreed curriculum guide lines from teacher training institutions.

Head teachers and parents of learners with deafblindness suggest that there is need to train them further in the area of deafblindness since they are the custodians of learners when they are at school. They need to be equipping with the necessary knowledge and skills in communication development in order to seal communication gap with children.

Conclusion

From the study findings, it is noted that teachers are willing to support learners with deafblindness. The major challenge identified lies in communication among the teachers and the learners themselves. Teachers lack proper training in the area of communication skills to instruct activities of daily living. There is need to empower teachers by way of carrying out continuous training to have an in-depth knowledge in the area of deafblindness. There is need to train teachers to attain adequate knowledge in the area of communication to support learners during ADL. There is a disparity between the quality of teachers from urban and peri-urban settings in terms of their educational levels and experience hence the need to harmonize the training from teacher training institutions. This was evidenced from one school that had recruited non trained deaf teachers. Identification and assessment of learners with deafblindness be prioritized so that appropriate communication and other intervention measures can be adopted. Challenges identified from the study cannot be addressed without approved policy guidelines in place so the policy on Special Needs Education is long overdue.

Recommendations

It is useful to encourage teachers to learn to use local resources to develop basic communication by critically observing and analyzing individual learners' adaptations in form of different communication modes for example; building on deictic/local gestures notwithstanding the local communication modes learner uses at home. Careful individual attention in terms of identifying communication methods is required. Teachers should be encouraged to pay attention and interpret Deictic (pointing) gestures that provide educational opportunities to introduce vocabulary to facilitate learner participation during activities of daily living.

Teachers should adapt a flexible approach in teaching learners with multisensory impairment by cultivating an understanding of natural bodily perceived gestures since learners with congenital deafblindness use gestures. Observe turn-taking and turn-giving for clarity and user feedback Teachers need to be equipped with appropriate communication techniques to support both congenital and adventitious deafblindness in all school curricula.

Another area of consideration is that teachers should plan for exploratory school visits to check on the progress of other teachers in terms of communication. School projects for learners observed in School B in Masaka such as poultry, gardening should be promoted as a gate way to sustaining transitional programs for learners who will eventually leave school.

Hearing peers in the school should be encouraged to learn different communication techniques to support learners with deafblindness since they share the same learning environment.

The ministry should establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme that will enable individuals funding, training of teachers and other service providers in all regional public universities and teacher training colleges including institutions of higher learning. Majority of the teachers currently fund their education in universities and teacher training colleges with minimal government financial support.

Teachers should be encouraged to work together with community development workers to adapt the SENSE project approach, of supporting individuals and families to develop a vision and goals for

their children, to improve access of learners with deafblindness in community and social participation, when learners eventually leave school.

The ministry should not only supply text books to schools but also other support materials. Teachers should be in-serviced in preparing locally developed materials to support in the teaching of communication techniques. The materials developed should be tailor made to suit all categories of learners.

It was evident from the findings that there were support staffs that were deaf and had no formal training in the area of special needs education and deafblindness. It is important for the government to offer affirmative action to persons with disabilities to join teacher training colleges so that they become role model teachers in schools.

A comprehensive program on identification and assessment of learners with deafblindness should be put in place to guide in developing interventions.

It was common to note that a majority of the teachers were restricted from furthering their studies. Develop courses tailored towards management of learners with deafblindness at primary school and teacher training colleges.

Areas for further Research

Further research is needed in transitional programs for deafblind adults who leave school and get integrated into the communities. Functional assessment of learners with deafblindness could be another area for further research. A study is required to establish in-depth causes of deafblindness basing on the social and clinical models of deafblindness. There are five regions in the country and the study only covered two regions and two schools. There is need to do a similar study in other regions with units of learners with deafblindness and regular schools that have enrolled children with deafblindness. Finally further research should be carried out to investigate various communication techniques during activities of daily living in the schools and in the community which the study may have overlooked.

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