



CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF EMBANGWENI PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, MZIMBA DISTRICT, MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 26 March 2020

Revised: 1 May 2020

Accepted: 29 May 2020

Published: 22 June 2020

Keywords

Hearing impairment
Disability
Malawi
Challenges
Education
Special need education
Physically challenge
Embangweni primary school.

Hearing impairment has been a major disability challenge globally and is considered to a threat to quality education in developing countries like Malawi. This article focuses on the challenges faced by learners with hearing impairments in a special school environment in Malawi. The study was conducted in a selected primary for the deaf in Mzimba District Malawi in 2013. The qualitative research approach was the main method adopted but questionnaires were used to collect basic demographic information about the respondents. The target groups were deaf students, teachers and head teacher of the Embangweni primary school for the deaf. In total, 45 respondents participated in the research (40, students and 5 teachers). The study revealed that students with special needs education are facing multiple challenges such as; shortage of hearing aids, communication barrier with the community surrounding the school, negative attitudes by the community, water supply problem, inadequate funding, abandonment by parents and relatives, shortage of teachers and the lack of transportation facility. These challenges posed both long and short term impact on the academic performance of students attached to the center. This study concludes that disabled students especially those with hearing impairment in rural Malawi are struggling to attain basic education. It is recommended that Malawi government improve financial funding and ensure that basic needed hearing equipment and food supply be made available to all disabled students suffering from hearing impairment. This study serves a baseline for future studies about challenges facing disabled people in Malawi.

Contribution/Originality: This research is one of very few studies which have investigated the challenges faced by learners with hearing impairment in remote localities in Malawi. The findings contribute to the existing knowledge on challenges facing person with disability around the globe. This study informs policy makers on disability challenges in Malawi.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Globally, education is considered a fundamental human right for all regardless of socio-economic and or physical wellbeing status (Udoba, 2014). Learning opportunities and facilities given to people with disability is termed “Special Needs Education” or (SNE). The term “special needs education” replaces the term disability when dealing with the educational aspect of people that are physically challenged (Mutugi, 2018). Special needs education

learners include persons facing difficulties in learning, growth disorder, behavior, inability to look after them selves, communicate and interact with normal people (Lindsay, 2007). In Malawi, the term Special Needs Education” refer to the education given to people with all form of disability.

The 2018 population and housing census of Malawi estimated that 1, 734,250 people have disability in Malawi. This number represents 11.6% of the total population of the country (Malawi Population and Housing Census Report, 2018). Malawi is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disability (CRPD) since 27th September, 2007 and enacted the Disability Act in 2012 (Malawi Government, 2020). Globally, it is estimated that 15% of the seven billion people are disable in some form (Agyire-Tettey, Cobbina, & Hamenoo, 2017; World Health Organization World Bank, 2011). Among the global disability index, hearing impairment is common (Kodiango & Syomwene, 2016). According to World Health Organization World Bank (2011) estimates, about 360 million people have hearing impairment disability globally. Global studies have shown that hearing impairment is worst in Africa as compare to other parts of the world (Agyire-Tettey et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2012). However, in Malawi, albinism is the most common disability and it account for 0.8 (134, 636) of the national population of the country (Malawi Population and Housing Census Report, 2018). About 24% of the people with disability in Malawi are those with hearing impairment (Malawi Population and Housing Census Report, 2018). In 2005, there were around 60,000 people with disability in Malawi (WHO, 2005).

Studies have found that hearing impairment have effect on certain developmental areas of children in their early ages. These areas are speech, intelligence, language, psychological development and educational achievement (Kodiango & Syomwene, 2016); Ndurumo (1993). A study by Agyire-Tettey et al. (2017) revealed that institutional barriers like reading learning materials, availability of facilities, teaching, curricular content and instructional processes seem to affect the academic performance of person with hearing impairment in Ghana.

Among the many rights people with disability in Malawi are entitled to is the right to education. In this regard, the Malawi government has signed global treaties on disability and has instituted several initiatives to support people with disability or learners with special education needs (SNE). For instance, the (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Right proclaimed that every child has the right to education regardless of their status. Similarly, UNESCO framework for action on SNE and the UN Standard Rules on Equal Opportunities for Disabled people (1993) as well as the Education for All (2002) was all geared towards providing basic education for all without discrimination (Malawi Human Rights Commission, 2003).

Although there are many organizations engaged in disability welfare, however, disabled people like those with hearing impairment are still faced with challenges and constrains in terms of education and social services. Most persons with hearing impairment in Malawi encounter challenges such as attitudes, stigma and myths held by society, inadequate specialist teachers, shortage of specialized teaching and learning resources and assistive devices and inadequate funding by the central governments.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The National Statistics figures based on EMIS (2007) showed that out of 69, 943 learners with SNs enrolled in schools 18,980 have hearing impairment. Although Malawi is a signatory to many declarations on education, provision of education to learners with hearing impairment remains inadequate. As a result of this, learners with hearing impairment have not been receiving appropriate education which enables them to reach their maximum potentials and contribute to national development. Many studies are being conducted on disabled student’s challenges across Malawi but none has specifically targeted people with hearing impairment in remote areas of Malawi. This study is poised to close this gap and present a clear picture of challenges faced by disabled people in Malawi.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the challenges faced by learners with hearing impairments in a special school environment.

1.3. Specific Objectives

This study aimed at:

1. Identifying challenges encountered by learners with hearing impairment at Embangweni Primary School for the Deaf.
2. Exploring how these challenges faced by learners with hearing impairment at Embangweni primary school have affected their learning.
3. Suggesting possible solutions to the challenges faced by learners with HIs at Embangweni primary school.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study will be vital to stakeholders and the general public in the provision of intervention strategies to address the plight of students with hearing impairments. Additionally, the study will add new insights to the existing body of knowledge in the domain of SNE and also it will open new avenues for further research in the education of students with special needs.

2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT CONCEPTS ABOUT HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

2.1. Meaning and concept of Special Needs Education

Special needs education is a term coined to refer to the educational needs of people with disability. Its focus is to improve the quality of education and life for the disabled people by trained personnel and required equipment (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996). Hallahan (2005) describe special needs education as a specifically designed learning instruction with no cost attached to parents. Globally, countries have realized that Special needs education is a fundamental right for person with disability and is crucial for reaching the global education for all target and the achievement of vision 2030 (Mwangi, 2013). Special needs education can further be described as the education specifically designed for people who are physically or mental handicap (Thomas, Walker, & Webb, 1997).

2.2. History of Special Needs Education in Malawi

The history of Special Needs Education (SNE) in Malawi is dated back to 1950 and was established by religious organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, South Africa Evangelical Church and the Dutch Reform Church respectively. The provision of SNE services began with the education of learners with visual impairments (VI). The first school for the deaf was established in 1968 by the Roman Catholic Church and it was situated in Charadzulo district which was followed by the building of the Specialist Teacher Training College at Montfort college campus. By 1967, the Malawian government officially began to provide funding to support some learners with SNE (Hauya & Makuwira, 1996). The Malawi government through the Policy Investment Framework has been working assiduously to provide a suitable enabling environment for people with SNE (PIF, 2001). The government has further designed the National SNE Policy that seeks to help persons with SNE in every part of the country and has been linked with National Education Sector Plan (Ministry of Education Science and Technology Malawi, 2008).

Malawi has four special residential schools for learners with hearing impairments which are Mua School in Dedza, Embangweni School for the deaf in Mzimba, Mary View in Chiradzulo, Mountain View school in Thyolo and Malawi Total Communication School (MATOCO) in Blantyre. These special schools are effective because the class size is smaller than in general education. Small classes facilitate more individual attention and small-group instruction. As a result of this, each student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and teachers try as much as possible to help each student advance towards his or her individual goals. There are three main categories

of special needs education in Malawi. These are Visual Impairment (Blind) Hearing Impairment (Deaf) and Learning Difficulties (Mental Handicaps). Currently, provision of special needs education services for learners with special educational needs is done through three educational programmes or educational models of service delivery for SN children. For instance, special (residential) schools, resource classroom centres (or Resource Centre Units) within the mainstream schools and itinerant teaching programs at primary schools level only.

2.3. What are Hearing Impairments?

Hearing impairment has been describe as the inability to hear below 25 decibels of sound and is categorized as fluctuating or permanent (Agyire-Tettey et al., 2017). Similarly, Kodiango and Syomwene (2016) refer to hearing impairment as the total loss or slight loss of hearing ability while Nordheimer and Brandl (2015) describe it as the deafness, dysfunction of the auditory system and hardness of hearing (Hardman, Drew, & Egan, 2005). Factors such as disease, accidents, tinnitus condition, heredity, ageing and noise from factories are among the common causes of hearing impairment (Kodiango & Syomwene, 2016; Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013). It covers the entire range of auditory impairments, encompassing both deaf person and the individual with a very mild loss. According to Quigley and Kretschmer (1998) there are different types of hearing impairments based on where along the auditory path way the hearing loss is sustained. The first is conductive hearing and it affects loudness or intensity linked with speech. The second is sensorineural hearing impairment and it affects the frequency, intelligibility and clarity of the sounds a person can hear. Quigley and Kretschmer (1998) further categorized the causes of hearing impairment into endogenic and exogenic factors. Endogenic factors are as a result of some biological cause or process such as hereditary, syndromes, metabolic endocrine disorders and blood incompatibilities. Exogenic factors are as a result of some accidents or of some foreign objects either blocking or destroying some aspect of the auditory mechanism. In addition, such exogenic factors include drugs, poisons, bacterial infections such as meningitis and viral infections such as mumps, rubella and measles

2.4. Challenges Facing Learners with Hearing Impairments

According to the World Federation for the Deaf data base, approximately 70 million people are considered deaf globally with 80% of these living in developing countries (World Federation of the Deaf, 2020). Based on the recent UN (2019) report on person with disability, physically challenged persons are said to encounter multiple barriers in terms of accessing education. People with disability were found to be less likely to attend school, complete school, drop out of school, possess basic skills and have fewer school year opportunities. The report further stated that discrimination and prejudice, absence of qualified teachers, lack of educational materials and disaggregated data research about disability continue to deny persons with disability the right to quality education globally (UN, 2019). WFD further observes that the deaf are among the poorest of the poor with limited access to education. Various problems inhibit learners with special needs education to attain their fullest potential by hindering their full participation. These include stigma by community or community attitude, inadequate specialist teachers and resource centres, shortage of specialized teaching and learning resources and assistive devices, ignorance or unawareness of most people that disability is not inability (Malawi Government, 2009).

2.5. Negative Attitudes, Stigma and Myths Held by Society

Traditional beliefs and societal pressure in Malawi has exposed persons with disability to partial or permanent abandonment in resource centers. The National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights stipulates that; myths and negative attitudes towards children with special needs hinder their education aspirations (Malawi Human Rights Commission, 2003). For example, myths held by some community are believed that having a disability connotes carrying evil spirits. While others believes that intercourse with a disable person can cured HIV/AIDS. This belief exposes most people with hearing impairments to harassment, bullying, abuse, school

dropout and has made some parent to become more protective of their disable children. Similarly, the Malawi Nation news paper of 5th October 2012 articulated that; many disabled children in Malawi suffer not only from the physical disability but also from stigma in their homes (The Nation news paper of 5th October 2012 p, 3). Additionally, Fichten and Amsel (1986) also stipulated that persons with disabilities are often described as overly sensitive, self-pitying, helpless, dependent, easily discouraged, non-ambitious and expecting special treatment from others. Based on a study conducted by Hops (1996) in Botswana, people attributed disability as being a curse as a result of witchcraft or parents violation of traditional standards or values. This societal stigmatization results in the abandonment of children with disability and sometimes complete rejection from their families. The author further articulated that these actions have both short term consequences like children with disabilities preferring to hide in remote cattle posts while the long term consequences discourages disabled children from attending formal schooling.

For some disabled, hearing loss is devastating, traumatizing and can be easily misconstrue as senility or absent mindedness (Hetu, 1993). To others, hearing impairment is a questioned to their self image and makes them feel insignificant and abnormal in society (Gudyanga, Wadesango, Hove, & Gudyanga, 2014). Yaker (1970) suggested that the negative and stereotype attitude has the potential to limit possible opportunities they deserve for their own advancement. Sometimes the limitations imposed on individuals with disabilities by the general public are worse than the disability itself.

On the global scale however, perceptions are shifting towards person with disability and learning opportunities. Furnham and Thompson (1994) argued that this change may be reflective of socially desirable answers rather than actual change. The theory of social desirability suggests that participants are inclined to respond favourably to items expressing what is deemed socially proper (Wright, 1983). In other words, attitudes toward persons with disabilities may not have changed significantly; instead, individuals may be less willing to convey their true feelings of negativity because they know it is less acceptable now to express prejudices and stereotypes towards hearing impaired learners in society.

2.6. Inadequate Specialist Teachers

The recent UN (2019) reports on disability suggested that countries should “*Provide training to teachers and other education specialists to gain knowledge and experience in inclusive education for persons with disabilities*” A study conducted by Mpfu and Shumba (2012) in Zimbabwe concludes that teachers teaching person with disability are grossly inadequate. They attributed the inadequacy of teachers to the government inability to train more teachers dealing with deaf students. They suggested that specialized teacher training by tertiary institutions and through in-service workshops is the appropriate avenue to equip teachers with the skills and competencies such as the knowledge of sign language. A famous blogger noted that teachers teaching sign language in Malawi lack adequate knowledge in the profession. These sign language interpreters are also generally located in the South of the country, so it is hard to get one in the North. Malawi is facing a lot of challenges in diverse areas more especially as they want to access communal or any other fundamental services. Government of Malawi EFA National Action Plan July (2004) also affirmed that access to quality education to learners with SN is most of the time impeded by shortage of well-trained teachers and this is also affirmed by the MOE 2007. However, most people avoid training to become SNE teachers because they believe the workload supersede the wages paid in Malawi. Hauya and Makuwira (1996) agreed with this by saying that teachers of special needs students are demoralized by problems of shortage of housing, low salaries and poor prospects as such they tend to shun SN training since they consider it to be too involving with few benefits than teaching ‘normal’ students.

2.7. Shortage of Specialized Teaching and Learning Resources and Assistive Devices

The Government of Malawi EFA National Action Plan (2004) affirmed that the access to quality education is most of the time impeded by lack of adequate teaching and learning materials such as learning devices for the hearing impaired learners. A research carried out by Mangope (2002) showed that the biggest challenge for teachers to provide appropriate education for learner with special needs was the lack of resources. Furthermore, the research also found out that special support services such as the provision of assistive devices in the schools for learners with special needs are not adequate. More than 60% of teachers said that such services were not provided.

2.8. Other Factors Affecting Hearing Impaired Learners

There are many factors affecting the person with hearing impairment. Inadequate funding by the government is one of the challenges. A study conducted by Ndhlovu (2008) supported this claim and stated that; inadequate funding in Somalia is affecting the effective provision of special needs for the disable in the country. The UN (2019) report also suggested that countries should increase their financial support for people with special education needs. Similarly, UNESCO (1994) suggested that government should increase funding while the Ministry of Education (2006) states that; non governmental organizations and the community should also supplement the efforts of the government in supporting Special needs education.

2.9. Malawi Government's Effort to Overcome These Challenges and Provide Effective SNE

Malawi has been making considerable progress in terms of special needs education support over the years (Fox & Liebenenthal, 2006; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008; Malawi Government, 2006; UN, 2019). The government has over the years established children with disability (CWC) and community based child care centers (CBCC) in both peri-urban and rural areas across Malawi (Neuman, McConnell, & Kholowa, 2014); (Soni et al., 2020) At present, Malawi has 14 registered disability organizations across the country that solely concentrates on issues affecting the disabled. Key among the organization are; *Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi; Malawi National Association for the Deaf; Visual Hearing Impairment Membership Association; Disability, HIV and AIDS Trust (DHAT) Malawi; Parents of Disabled Children Association in Malawi; Malawi Disability Sports Association* etc. (Malawi government, 2020). In secondary schools and universities, the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA) provides more assistance to students on the basis of merit and need.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Location

The study was conducted at Embangweni Primary School for the Deaf in Mzimba District. The school is situated 47 kilometers south of Mzimba Town. Mzimba District is designated as the biggest District in Malawi and is located in the north of the country. The District is bordered by Kasungu to the South, Nkhatabay to the East, Zambia to the West and Rumphi to the North respectively. Mzimba town is the administrative and biggest urban city in the District (World Bank, 2011). Mzimba District covers an area of 10, 430 sq. km with a population of 610, 944 (Population and housing Census of Malawi, 2018). This study was conducted in 2013.

3.2. Research Design

The study design was mainly qualitative in nature due to the fact that it required a comprehensive description of themes to solicit the required information needed. This research was designed for in-depth interviews and the interpretation of the forty five (45) participants including teachers and students was done verbatim.

3.3. Target Population

The target population of the study consisted of learners with hearing impairment and teachers at Embangweni Primary School for the Deaf in Mzimba District, Malawi. This population was chosen because they fit the scope of hearing impaired learners and teachers dealing with learners with hearing impairment to provide the primary information needed for the study.

3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique.

A total of forty hearing impaired learners and five teachers were selected. The researcher chose this number because it represents 20% of the persons with disabilities present in the school as at that time and were enough to provide detailed information needed for the study. Purposive sampling was used in choosing the participants. The researcher chose those hearing impaired learners who are older and have stayed for more years 7-10 years at Embangweni Primary school for the Deaf but also teachers who have worked for at least five years. The researcher believed that participants with such characteristics were conversant with the situations at Embangweni primary school and were able to provide rich data about challenges learners with hearing impairments were encountering during their stay there.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires, non participant observation and structured interviews were employed as data collection tools. The observation approach helped to ensure zero interference to the proceedings and that natural setting was not distorted. Interviews helped in capturing some of the information that was not captured by observation alone. This triangulation enabled the researcher to collect sufficient and unambiguous data for the study but also enabled the researcher to be confident about the accuracy of those different tools employed in data collection. The different approaches yielded substantially the same results, consequently ensuring the validity and reliability of the data. Hogle and Sweat (1996) argue that, "*Capturing what people say in their own words is the most important contribution of qualitative research to understanding human behaviour*"

3.6. Pre-Testing or Pilot Study

The questionnaire and structured interviews were pre-tested on any five randomly chosen hearing impaired students at Embangweni primary school for the Deaf. This was done in order to find out if there was any possibility that worthwhile results could be found and to ensure the validity and reliability of the tools. Furthermore, the pilot study was conducted to check if the questions were well understood. Unclear questions were modified and irrelevant question were eliminated.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data from the tape recording interviews was transcribed verbatim. Thereafter, the demographic data from questionnaire and interview schedules were first coded to derive categories and themes that formed the basis of the study.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Demographic Results

The interview and the questionnaires collected data on the following demographic characteristics; the respondent's sex, age, and year they joined Embangweni primary School for the Deaf. Table 1 shows a summary of the demographic characteristics of respondents. The sex, age and number of respondents of all students interviewed are captured in (Table 1).

Table-1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Sex	Age Range	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	19-22	20	50%
Female	17-22	20	50%

Table-2. Demographic characteristic of teachers.

Sex	Age Range	Number of respondents	Education	Class taught	Percentage
Male	25-40	5	Certificate Diploma	1-8	100%

The Forty participants (40) were interviewed (20 female and 20 males). All the selected participants have stayed at Embangweni primary school for the deaf for seven to fifteen years. The youngest participant was Seventeen years and the oldest was twenty two years. Twenty participants were from standard seven (7) and another twenty participants from standard eight (8). The demographic characteristics of teachers show that the age range of teachers was 25-40 years and they were all males (Table 2).

4.1.1. Qualitative Results

The analysis of the qualitative data has led to the grouping of the results into ten main themes that emerged, which are;

- i. Shortage of hearing aids.
- ii. Communication barrier with the community surrounding the school.
- iii. Negative attitudes by the community.
- iv. Water supply problem.
- v. Inadequate funding.
- vi. Abandonment by parents and relatives.
- vii. Shortage of teachers.
- viii. Transportation problems.

4.2. Discussion of Findings.

The study has revealed many challenges faced by learners with hearing impairments.

4.2.1. Shortage of Hearing Aids

Out of forty participants, only nine (9) had hearing aids. This shows that there is an acute shortage of hearing aids at Embangweni primary School for the deaf since this number only represents 22%. This is a clear manifestation of the inadequacy of the basic hearing aid needed for persons with disability at the Embangweni primary school. For pupils with hearing impairment, the unavailability of hearing aid will have grave impact on their academic output. Without this hearing aid, no learning will take place because they won't be able to hear any sound. As such, the teachers had to repeat their statements several times for the students to hear and decode the message being transmitted to them. Due to this hearing aid shortage, pupils in the school admitted that completing the syllabus on time was difficult and it affects students preparing for primary school leaving certificate examination negatively.

‘This affects our learning in that we cannot understand what the teacher is saying if we are not using the hearing aids during the teaching and learning process’

However, the teachers stated that the shortage of the hearing aid was in most cases the fault of the student's selves. *“Although the supplies of hearing aid is not consistent, yet most students misplace their hearing aid or destroy them before the next supplies are available”* More than 60% of teachers said that such services were grossly inadequate in the school.

This finding is inline with Mangope (2002) study which concludes that; the biggest challenge for teachers is to provide appropriate education for learner with special needs was the lack of hearing aid resources. The government of Malawi also affirmed that access to quality sensitive education material is a challenge for special needs education in Malawi. Mwangi (2013) also stated that special need education equipment in Kenya are expensive and mostly unavailable to disable children because their parents and learning institution cant afford to provide for all students. Similarly, Kiyuba and Tukur (2014) investigated the challenges facing disable students and found that learning and teaching materials for special needs education in Tanzania were inadequate. The absence of these learning equipment's have both short and long term benefits on students with hearing impairment in Malawi.

4.2.2. Communication Barrier with the People Surrounding the School

The study also disclosed that communication barrier with the people surrounding the school was another challenge facing learners with hearing impairments at Embangweni primary school for the deaf. Since many people around the school were not familiar with sign language, it is very difficult for the learners to communicate with their peers in neighboring schools like the Embangweni primary school and Robert laws Secondary School.

‘This denies us an opportunity to chat and share experience with our ‘normal’ friends because they cannot hear what we are saying and we cannot hear them as well. Not only this, but also we fail to buy things that we want at the market although we have money simply because we cannot communicate and the market people don’t understand the sign language’

This result correspond with the findings of Mapunda, Omollo, and Bali (2017) which stated that; communication between families and school personnel with student having hearing impairment was poor in Tanzania. The absence of good hearing aid and trained language and sign teachers in the school makes communication difficult between pupils with disability and their community. With out being able to communicate, student with hearing impairment are at disadvantage in rural communities and can’t make use of community services. This situation affects learners’ education because learning does not take place only inside the classroom but also through interaction with different people around the school. Thus, communication barrier retards social learning.

“Learning does not take place inside the classroom only, but also one can learn by interacting with different people around him or her. So due to this communication barrier, we are failing to learn so many things from our fellow learners who are not deaf.”

4.2.3. Negative Attitudes by the Community.

The study also revealed that negative attitude by the community towards learners with hearing impairments was also a major challenge faced by the students. These negative attitudes in turn caused feelings of self pity, anxiety and behaviours such as isolation. These feelings made some students not to effectively concentrate on their studies.

“Because we cannot communicate or interact with other people in the society, they consider us as rude, evil, proud and bad luck people or even say we are just burden to society. But we are not bad people but they cannot understand the sign language in which we communicate”

The negative attitude of some citizens towards disable people in Malawi is common. This attitude affects the moral and emotional aspects of pupils in the school and that in turn affects their ability to concentrate in class. The National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Mapunda et al. (2017) also affirmed that negative attitudes towards children with special needs hinder their educational progress and social wellbeing (Mapunda et al., 2017). Negative attitudes and rejecting children with hearing impairments and referring to them as a burden to the society frustrate the already deprived students. Similarly, myths held by some communities that having a disability child connotes carrying evil spirits and that disability is inability affects students learning as well. In support of this inhuman attitude, the Malawi Nation news paper (2012) stated that *“Many disabled children in*

Malawi suffer not only from the physical disability but also from stigma in their homes” (The Nation news paper, 2012). This attitude by society has a negative impact on their learning because they felt they are not considered important in the community. In this case, they lacked support from the community hence their hardworking spirit and moral is lowered. A study by Conti (2000) examine the essence of motivation on the academic performance of students with disability in Southeaster New Jersey. The author found that intrinsic motivation is less for people with disability and has impact on their academic performance in some ways.

However, out of forty respondents, nine students stated that some people around the school show positive attitudes towards them. *“Some people in our neighborhood are very nice to us. They feel that if we can be given appropriate education we can be useful in society and that being deaf is not the end of some one’s life. Apart from that, they do greet us whenever we meet but also they sometimes give us gifts in form of foodstuffs and clothing”*

According to Kabuta (2014) and Jahnukainena and Helander (2007) the most socially mistreated groups in society has been people with disability. UNICEF (2013) opines that disable individuals contend with diverse forms of exclusion. Society, culture and locality have different impact on people with disability and developing countries are the most vulnerable places for disable people. Pupils with hearing impairment problem in Malawi are mostly marginalized because of their deaf status and it could be attributed to the rural setting of most disable centers.

4.2.4. Water Supply Problem

Based on the study result, water availability was found to be a big problem at Embangweni primary school for the deaf. There was only one borehole at the school and it equally serves the neighboring households. It was observed that the hostels bathrooms had no showers or running waters. Therefore, students had to fetch water to use the bathrooms and toilet each time they use them. The pressure from neighboring communities in the morning leads to queue for water to bath and eventually rush for class.

“Our bathrooms have no showers so we fetch water in our buckets from the borehole for us to take a bath. But the bad thing with this is that, we are supposed to be in a long queue and the community people wouldn’t allow us to fetch water first. This situation results in us being late every morning for classes and it affect our academic performance in class.

Access to clean drinking water is still a big challenge in rural Malawi as such; boreholes are the main source of water for most communities. This water shortage challenge affects the hygiene and punctuality of students for their morning lessons.

4.2.5. Inadequate Funding

In an interview with the head teacher of Embangweni primary school for the deaf, the head teacher pointed out that the school was inadequately funded. He continued to say that the budget allocation for the year has been slashed to half the usual amount allocated to them.

“A lot of problems have emanated from this slash down of the budget. For example, the food stuffs supply is no longer adequate because there is not enough money to purchase the needed quantity. As a result of this, learners do not have a balanced meal every day as required. Therefore, some students who are not well fed resort to the cutting of neighbor’s sugarcanes and plucking of mangoes from the neighborhood and this destroy the reputation of the school. Some community members attack the school for not taking good care of the students in return. The problem of students trespassing into surrounding fields could be dealt with if we the school had a wall fence that could prevent them from going out unnoticed”

Malawi is among the least developed nations on earth and therefore it faces challenges of adequate funding in almost all sector supported by the government and the school of Embangweni primary school for the deaf is not an exception. The economic situation of Malawi is challenging and the country heavily depends on foreign donors to support the national budget each year. Besides the Embangweni primary school for the deaf, other learning institutions are facing the same problem every year. Inadequate funding for a disable school like the Embangweni primary school for the deaf is unfortunate and have resulted in poor learning environment and social insecurity for

the pupils in the school. Inadequate funding hinders the sustainable progress of special needs education in Malawi. Base on the recent UN (2019) reports, inadequate funding in developing countries like Malawi is making access to quality education by people with disability difficult and impossible. Mutugi (2018) carried out a study in Kenya on the challenges facing people with special need education and concluded among others that inadequate funding was a challenge in ensuring quality special need education to disable students. A paper presented on the 47th session of international conference center on education affirmed that inadequate funding in Malawi is a big challenge for the development of schools hosting people with special needs education. Residential schools and resource centers largely depend on donation from well wishers because of inadequate funding from the government. The reduction in funding support to the center has affected food supply, to an extent that some students will go without food some hours and meals preparation are delay most times. This resulted in poor performance among the students.

“This year’s (2013) budget allocation has been slashed to half the money we used to have, I do not know why the government has done this, and at least they could have considered this rising cost of living before making such a move. This has a devastating effect on how the school should be run. For example, for us to buy food for the students it requires a lot of money and because we do not have enough money we fail to provide enough food and balanced diet to the students. Sometimes, students go without having breakfast to class and hence fail to concentrate on what is being taught. This has both short and long term impact on their academic performance”

4.2.6. Abandonment by Parents and Relatives

The study found that Embangweni primary school for the deaf is being used by some parents and relatives to abandon children with hearing impairments. Some learners at Embangweni stated that their parents and relatives have never returned to visit or take them home during holidays since they were brought to the school. This attitude by some parents has created psychological problems for some pupils and place huge financial burden on the center as well. Also, some parent expects the school to drop their children at their homes during holidays but the school doesn’t own a car. Therefore majority of the student stay in the school dormitory throughout the years of their studies and this mean more financial burden to the school administration.

“it is like our relatives do not want us to live with them in the villages since may be we are like a burden to them as such when the holiday approaches they do not come to pick us. We think they consider us being at home a burden to them and Embangweni is a dumping ground that is why they do not want to pick us up during the holidays. As a result of this, we are forced to stay at school and life here is tough and also we feel like we are burden to the school to keep on feeding us during the holidays. This has a negative impact on our learning because we feel that if our own parents and relatives do not want and count on us then it means that whatever we are doing is useless and we also consider our education useless as we are also considered to be useless in society in future. This thought affects our academic performance greatly”. The act of abandoning disable children in government care centers across Malawi may not be unconnected with the economic situation in the country. Most household hardly afford two square meals a day in Malawi and people in rural areas are the worst affected. Based on recent estimates, 50.7% of Malawian lives below the poverty line (CIA World Fact Book, 2020).

4.2.7. Shortage of Teachers

The study found that only 19 teachers were employed by the center to teach 188 hearing impaired students. Out of the 19 teachers five were on study leave at different colleges to upgrade their education level. This meant that only 14 teachers had to teach 188 students as at the time of conducting this study. This raised the teacher student ration to 1:19 instead of the accepted standard in Malawi of 1: 10.

“We the teachers are very few and yet some of our colleagues are on study leave. This situation has added more work load for us to a point that we fail to complete the syllabus on time”. The presence of few teachers’ is believed to have compromise standard of education in the center. However, most teachers prefer not to teach in disable centers because of the workload and special skills needed to teach in these schools. Secondly, some teachers believed that

the wages are not commensurate to the workload and so they will prefer teaching in normal schools that disable schools. Mpofo and Shumba (2012) in Zimbabwe investigated the challenges faced by student with special needs education and conclude that inadequate teachers are one of the problems affecting disable schools in Zimbabwe. The author's research agrees with this study that most disable schools lack adequate and trained teachers. They further stated that in-service training programs and pre-service early teacher preparation are limited because there is no desire on the part of administrators to train SN teachers. The United Nations (2019) report lend credence to this study by stating that; most disable centers in Malawi and other African countries lacks trained and adequate number of teachers. Education for All, National Action Plan (2004) and the Ministry of Education (2007; 2018) affirmed that there is a shortage of teachers across schools in Malawi.

"This affects us because most time we stay for a long time without learning and this too affects our timely completion of the syllabus as such when it comes to National examinations we tend not to do very well because we did not finished our syllabus." Agyire-Tettey et al. (2017) findings supported the findings of this study by stating that; institutional barriers affects disable student's academic performance in Ghana. The availability of only few teachers at the Embangweni primary school for the deaf is a big challenge in executing the special need education task in Malawi.

4.2.8. Transportation Problems

The study revealed that Embangweni primary school for the deaf lack transportation means in the center. This means the center can only hire a vehicle when it services are needed.

"One of my greatest challenge in managing this center is the absence of a vehicle to convey food supply, students and staffs when the need arise. Sometimes when students fall sick at night we have to rush to drivers in the neighborhood. This challenge is really severe because the cost of transportation keep increasing every day and our funding is inadequate". With over 188 students in the center, the absence of a vehicle in the center is a great concern. The movement of both staff and students is limited and the delivery of food supply is cumbersome too. Majority of the students admitted that the absence of a vehicle makes their movement out of the center very difficult. As already stated in the research geographical location, Embangweni primary school for the deaf is located 47 kilometers south of Mzimba boma Town. This mean it is situated far away from big cities and so only through transportation one can get to those cities. Furthermore, purchasing food stuff for the center was difficult due to the high transportation cost by commercial car drivers. With the absence of a school car, it was very difficult for the school to take students who usually fall ill and had been referred to Mzimba District hospital in good time

"The absence of a vehicle in the center affects our learning so much because when one is sick he or she stays for a long time before being taken to the hospital simply because there is no school car. Some of our colleagues have to wait for hours or days before a car is sometimes found to take them to hospital. Additionally, with the absence of school vehicle foodstuffs delivery is difficult and is sometimes delay. This delay sometime affects our meal preparation time and classes. In most cases, we ignore the teacher and concentrate on our hunger because we can't concentrate while hungry and this has affected our academic performance"

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that student with hearing impairment at the Embangweni primary school for the deaf are faced with multiple challenges in the center. These challenges include; shortage of hearing aids, careless handling of hearing aids by learners, communication barrier with the surrounding community, negative attitudes by the community, water supply problem, inadequate funding, abandonment of pupils by parents and relatives, shortage of teachers as well as transportation problem. The geographical location of the school also serves as a barrier in executing special needs education programs for the disable. The economic situation of Malawi has direct and indirect impacts on the welfare and management of the Embangweni primary school for the deaf. Going forward, a conducive environment has to be created for hearing impairment learners to

be successful in the learning process by providing solutions to the challenges highlighted by the study. The study recommends that Malawi government improve financial funding and ensure that basic needed hearing equipment be made available to all students suffering from hearing impairment.

5.1. The Way Forward and Government Efforts

The Malawian government has enacted and review relevant policies connected with disabilities in the country. To overcome these challenges the Malawi government is putting modalities in place to provide education for learners with special needs. For instance, the Malawi government has proposed building 150 resource centers for students with special needs country wide and a special need institute to train teachers. Additionally, the government has introduced component of special needs education in the six regular teaching colleges, inclusion for learners with special need is also emphasized. The government also encourages parents to send their children with SN to school. The summary of challenges and suggested solutions for the study are listed in (Table, 3) below.

Table-3. Suggested solutions to the problems facing learners with hearing impairments.

Challenge	Suggested Solutions
Shortage of hearing aids.	Provision of enough hearing aids by the Government, Non Governmental Organizations, donors and well wishers can suffice.
Communication barrier with the people surrounding the school.	Making sign language a national language so that people may be able to communicate with the deaf in different places like in markets, hospitals and in homes will help deaf students.
Negative attitudes by the community	Sensitizing or civic educating the community that disability is not inability and that deaf students are equally human beings.
Water supply problem	Providing an alternative source of water to ease water problem on campus and in the neighborhood.
Inadequate funding	The Malawian government, International partners, and other NGOs, should prioritize funding to centers hosting disable people.
Abandonment by parents and relatives	Government should ensure that parent visit their children and or their children visited them. Civic educating parents on their roles and responsibilities as parents for the deaf pupils and that disability is not inability hence it is not a guarantee for them to abandon their children.
Shortage of teachers	The Government should train and send more specialist teachers in sign languages to disable schools in rural areas.
Transportation problems.	Provision of a car to ease transportation problem.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgement: The authors acknowledge the assistance given to them by the Embangweni Primary for the deaf administration Malawi during data collection.

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