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A Case Study of Pumulo Mulembi A Learner with Visual Impairment at St. Mulumba Special School in Choma- Zambia

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Abstract

The manuscript is a case study of a visually impaired learner with a fictitious name of Pumulo. It was establishing the benefits of the teaching methods used and the benefits of the Zambian policies on an individual learner with visual impairment. It was discovered that, the teaching methods the teacher used were partially helpful. The policies were discovered to be of help and have been implemented in a progressive way despite the economic status of the country. Other aspects were also investigated in order to understand the child fully and these were the family background, case history, physical appearance, intellectual ability and social ability.

Keywords: Policies, Method and Visual Impairment

Introduction

This paper brings out the brief background of special education in Zambia, the policies, the teaching methods and how learners with visual impairment benefit during the process of learning.

Historical background of special education for learners with visual impairment in Zambia

The evolution of Special education in Zambia is quite recent. Early history has it that it was a taboo if anyone gave birth to a child with disabilities. In many cases the child was thrown away, in Tonga traditions such children were killed by sitting on them until they suffocated. The coming of the missionaries changed the superstitions that existed.

The wife of the Dutch Reformed Church Missionary, Issie Hofmeyr attempted to provide some form of special education in 1905 in Magwero – Chipata. According to Snelson (1974), the aim of Hofmeyr was to make the gospel known to the blind. When she died in 1910, Ella Botes took over and opened a class at Madzimoyo but the number increased such that she had to open a school at Magwero Snelson (1974). Later the Franciscan Fathers opened one in Ndola at Bwana Mkubwa. The Evangelical Missionary Society also later on opened a school for the blind in Sefula Western province.

As time went on, a good number of schools for the visually impaired were opened. Today we have a good number of schools and units for the visually impaired in Zambia. Some of them are in different provinces and are as follows; in Southern Province there is Rusangu Secondary School in Monze, Kalomo High School in Kalomo, St. Mulumba is a Special School in Choma, Maamba Special Unit in Maamba, Flamboyant Special School in Mazabuka, Nanga Special Unit in Mazabuka, and Christ the King Special unit in Livingstone. In Western Province there is Sefula Secondary School. In Copperbelt Province there is Ndola Lions in Ndola and Mano Basic School in Mufulira. In Central Province there is Danford Chirwa Basic School in Lukanga in Kabwe, Mumbwa High school in Mumbwa. In Lusaka Province there is U.T.H. Special School in Lusaka, Bauleni Special Needs School in Lusaka, Munali Secondary School in Lusaka, the Zambia National Library for the Blind has a Computer Training School for the Blind and the rehabilitation centre for those who

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become visually impaired later in life in Chilenje in Lusaka. In Lwapula Province there is St. Mary School for the Blind in Kawambwa. In Northern Province there is a unit at Mporokoso Secondary School in Mporokoso, then Mporokoso School for the visually impaired. There is Chila Basic in Mbala. In Eastern province there is Magwero School for the visually impaired and a unit at Katete Secondary School.

Some schools are offering inclusive education to learners with visual impairment in Zambia. This is because inclusive schools are of help to learners with visual impairment (Dark & Light Blind Care 2008).

It is from one of the schools that Pumulo was exposed to formal education where the researchers found him.

Policies in support of education for learners with visual impairment in Zambia

There are several policies that have supported the education of the visually impaired in Zambia and some of them are as follows;

The 1977 Educational Reform supported the education of the visually impaired and this is what they state, "the blind and partially sighted should also receive appropriate medical treatment and suitable training to enable them to cope with their handicaps. Those who are totally blind cannot learn through the use of methods involving sight. Therefore special methods have to be devised. Those who are partially sighted also need medical attention and education. These are handicapped children who cannot follow the ordinary teaching and learning process without treatment and aids for their sight. Special equipment and materials may be necessary such as lenses, spectacles, books in large print."(Ministry of Education, 1977)

Focus on learning of 1992 focused on the following issues on special education; introduction of pre-service training in special education, introduction of special education in pre-schools, establishing a special education structure in the Ministry and establishing an appropriate progression system for pupils with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 1992).

Educating our future was another National Policy which was enacted in 1996 and it supports the education of the visually impaired. It states, "The ministry of education upholds the principle that every individual has an equal right to educational opportunity. This means that every individual, regardless of personal circumstances or capacity, has a right of access to and participation in the education system. Ensuring full equality of access, participation and benefit for all pupils necessitates interventions at all levels to support children at risk."

The policy on pupils with special educational needs states;

1. The Ministry will ensure equality of educational opportunities for children with special educational needs.
2. The Ministry is committed to providing education of particularly good quality to pupils with special educational needs.
3. The Ministry will improve and strengthen the supervision and management of special education across the country.

(Ministry of Education.1996)

The above policies support learners with special needs and the visually impaired are part of them. Thus, the policies are in support of Pumulo's education as his right.

Family background

The researchers researched on the background of Pumulo in order to understand him fully... Hallahan et al (2009) stated that the background of a special child is cardinal in order to understand the child's need fully.

Pumulo Mulembi was 12 years old at the time of study. He lived in the outskirts of Monze. In his family there were 10 siblings of whom 2 were girls and 8 boys, he was the last born. Of the 10 children of his family 4 boys were visually impaired and 6 were sighted of which 2 were girls and 4 were boys. Then both parents were sighted.

Pumulo was in grade 3 at St. Mulumba Special School in Choma. He was quite old for the grade. He started school quite late because of financial difficulties. Where the parents lived there was no school that could accommodate the visually impaired children. The only nearest school was St. Mulumba special school in Choma which is more than 100 kilometres from Pumulo's home and the parents could not afford to pay boarding fees. When social welfare came to his aid that was when Pumulo began school and this was three years before the study was administered.

Case history

Case history is vital because it brings out the specific need of a child with disabilities Kirk et al (2000). Thus in this case of Pumulo the specific need was visual impairment.

Pumulo was born with visual impairment and was totally blind. He was the fourth child in his family to be born with visual impairment so the problem of visual impairment was suspected to have been caused by hereditary factors.

Physical appearance

Physical appearance of a child is in a position to tell if the child is multiply disabled or not (Kirk et al 2000). Pumulo's physical appearance indicated that, he was only blind and not multiply disabled.

Pumulo was totally blind, because he was unable to tell when there was light and when there was not. In his pupils there were big white spots which looked like cataracts, but it was quite different because these looked brighter and not cloudy. He had a habit of pressing his fingers into the eye sockets and plays with his eye balls. His eyes were clean with no discharges, they looked normal except for the spots on the pupils.

In terms of general cleanliness, Pumulo knew how to take care of himself. He was able to do his own laundry; he was a clean looking boy. His hair was always well shaved. However, his weak area was that he was not able to mend or sew his clothes may be due to his lack of sight, this was seen from some of his clothes which sustained a tear, it stayed there for a long time.

Intellectual ability

Intellectual ability of a learner indicates the mental ability of the child being researched on (Hallahan et al 2009). Pumulo's intellectual ability was above average as being picked from the information below.

The teachers who were interviewed by researchers taught Pumulo when he was in his second grade. The teachers reported that, he learnt to read English quite fast, after

coming from grade one where he had to use the New Break Through to Literacy (NBTL). This was an approach to literacy using the local language. He responded well to Step in to English (SITE) programme. But his Braille was not neat, not because he did not know his Braille but he was just not smart at Braille writing just like having bad handwriting. He always finished writing very fast and this made him make a lot of mistakes which he tended to erase a lot.

Pumulo liked all the subjects that he took. His favourite were Mathematics, Social and Development Studies, Science and Chitonga a local language subject. He found English quite difficult although he could read it very well. He did not like the grammar part of English.

He was able to write Braille and could compose a story in English or Chitonga which was his local language. When he was given a choice of language to use when writing a story, he went for Chitonga. He was able to construct a story in English but with difficult. Lastly, teachers stated that, Pumulo was generally good in class.

Social ability

Social ability is a cardinal skill and acts as a channel of learning at all levels whether academic or not (Hallahan et al 2009). In the case of Pumulo, he possessed the social skill as reported below.

The teachers narrated that, Pumulo was able to interact with others quite easily. One could say he was an extrovert. In school he was able to interact with the hearing impaired learners. He had learnt simple signs for sign language like good, bad, yes, no, I do not want, and so on. He was also able to interact with the intellectually challenged, so he did not only interact with those with visual impairment but with everyone. When he was asked about how many friends he had, his response was, 'he can fill up two rooms.' Meaning they were too many to mention. He was as well able to defend himself when attacked by others and he spoke very convincingly in the classroom and outside.

Further teachers responded that, in school he was in the choir and he was one of the best singers. On two occasions in school, two people liked his voice and awarded him handsomely.

It was also reported that, at home he was friendly for example he accompanied friends as they went to look after cattle in the bush because Tonga land is a part of Zambia where cattle is kept by most people if not every household as family worthy.

Teaching methods used by teachers when teaching Pumulo

The teacher who was teaching Pumulo at the time of study used a variety of teaching methods. He found it easy to teach Pumulo in his class because they were only three learners in it. Thus, almost all the time the teacher was able to give individual attention to this learner and as a result the learner was doing very well. A question and answer approach was also utilised by the teacher apart from individual teaching. Then the teacher also used demonstration method to teach Pumulo. The teacher indicated that apart from individual method other methods did not fit quite well, because the learner had no sight in order to understand all what was taught more accurately.

The methods that the teacher was hesitant to use were enquiry and demonstration methods. Whenever he had used

these methods it was not to his satisfaction basing on the response of Pumulo as compared to his classmates. Pumulo also tended to fear to try things he was not familiar with or go into the environment he has never been on his own when enquiry method was used. He also complained of not understanding the concepts fully when demonstration method was used which involved the use of colours in subjects such as science.

Benefits of the policies and teaching methods to Pumulo Policies

The policies have been of great help and have been acting as a backup to education of learners with visual impairment. For instance, the number of schools and units being opened up in the country and the education being offered is a sign of the commitment by the Zambian government to the lives of learners with visual impairment. This commitment has trickled down to the life of Pumulo as an individual learner with visual impairment who has been reported to having benefited by knowing to read and write using braille. It has been reported that his intellectual ability has been developed fairly.

Teaching Methods

The methods of teaching have been influenced by the National policies like Educational Reforms, Focus on learning and Educating our future, the curriculum frame works through the syllabi that reached the teacher who was able to access them and interpret them into the teaching methods that he used to teach Pumulo. By and large, the policies seep through to the bottom of the affected learner. Pumulo benefited partially from the methods with the use of individual teaching method only. However, the teacher faced challenges while teaching Pumulo because of his lack of sight. The child had problems in terms of learning or grasping all what was being taught when some methods were being administered such as enquiry and demonstration methods.

Recommendations

For Pumulo as a learner with visual impairment to benefit more from the policies and methods the following need to be done;

Methods

- Teachers for the learners with visual impairment should be trained in the use of appropriate teaching method that arise with time and then use it to teach learners with visual impairment.
- The government should make sure that already trained teachers should have refresher courses in order to be in touch with new technology and new methods of teaching the learners with visual impairment that arise with time.
- Teachers should have an input on the policies that are formulated in the country and every teacher should be oriented before the policies are put to use.
- The Zambian government should invest into an exchange program with other countries so the teachers can have an experience on how other countries teach the learners with visual impairment.

Policies

- The future policies should specify the appropriate teaching method which is required when teaching learners with visual impairment.
- More schools, units and inclusive classes for the learners with visual impairment should be opened in the provinces of Zambia in order to help learners with visual impairment access and start school early.
- The policies and laws should continue backing up the education for learners with visual impairment.

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