

https://dspace.org/

Understanding gender identities in an African communitarian world view

Vitumbiko Nyirenda; S Sesanti

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/39138
WOS

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 4 Issue 9-September 2023 pp 1058-1071
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2023494

"Nothing About Us Without Us" - The Storied Narratives of a Learner with Hearing Impairment

Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala[1], and Maximus Monaheng Sefotho[2]

[1] Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa and Division of Languages, Literacies and Literatures, Wits School of Education, South Africa.
[2]Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The motivation for this study was the realization that the mantra: "nothing about us without us" is indeed a strong foundation for a better understanding of the learning experiences of learners with a hearing impairment.Therefore, analysing the lived experiences of a learner as an insider is a point of departure for the current research paper. The emphasis was to conduct a qualitative research study anchored on an interpretivist paradigm. The study adopted Sen's Capabilities Approach in framing the lenses through which to view the phenomena under evaluation. The study analysed a journal paper about the reflections of a Deaf researcher who attended a mainstream school. The findings of the study suggested that the narratives of learners with hearing impairment seem to give a better perspective of their learning experiences. As such, hearing their stories can be used as the basis for the evaluation of teaching strategies on the one hand; and education policies that address their unique and diverse learning needs on the other.

Keywords: *Storied Narratives, Hearing Impairment, Special Educational Needs, Teaching Strategies, Content Analysis, South African Sign Language (SASL)*

Correspondence
Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala
Email:
ntsoaki.mokala@wits.ac.za

Publication History
Received 18th May, 2023
Accepted 16th June, 2023
Published online 7th September, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The needs of learners with hearing impairment have been officially recognised in many countries including South Africa. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the starting point in support of equality, and democratic values of human dignity and freedom through the Bill of Rights.[1] In reference to education, the constitution aims to redress the inequalities of the past within one education system through inclusive education measures. The principle of education for all is further encrypted within the South African Schools Act of 1997. Education White Paper 6 is a founding document for inclusive education in South Africa.[2] Supporting this is Mokala who has stated that "…the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System is the first official

[1] *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Government Gazette, 1996).
[2] South Africa. Department of Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of Education Pretoria, 2001).

© 2023 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.
This is an open access article under the CCBY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

document that introduced inclusive education as a discourse and policy in South Africa."[3] Glaser and Van Pletzen observe that since 1994, the democratic South African government has faced the challenge of providing quality education for its multicultural population.[4] Consequently, one of the mandates pursued includes the aim to address the right to education for all. The DoE echoes the same sentiments by stipulating that every disabled child has a right to education and training.[5] Therefore, all children have the right to enjoy a full service of education and maintain a high level of self-dependence and social participation. This is further encrypted in the South African Constitution to ensure equity for all citizens as Section 29(1) states: "Everyone has the right to basic education including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible."[6]

This paper is thus an analysis of a deaf learner's reflections on his educational experiences. The researchers' interest in writing this paper was sparked by the realization that the mantra: "nothing about us without us" is indeed a strong foundation for a better understanding of the learning experiences of learners with hearing impairment. Sefotho warns that "initially this mantra excites as one reads, but on deeper analysis, it poses more challenges than expected, as its practical implications may be more complex."[7] Nevertheless, the researchers do not intend to go deeper into what challenges this mantra can bring. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to unpack the perspectives of the learner who brings his own storied narratives as a learner in a mainstream school. Giving an account of one's experiences gives a better perspective on what learners with hearing impairment go through in a mainstream classroom which is believed to provide a better learning experience. The belief is that learners with disabilities should not be sent to special schools as they cannot enjoy socialising with their peers is a challenge. Contrary to this belief, UNESCO firmly believes that "…special schools will have a very important role to play in an inclusive system."[8] The new roles for these schools include providing expertise and support, especially in curriculum, assessment, and instruction, as part of the district support team to neighbourhood schools, especially "full-service" schools. This role also includes providing appropriate and quality educational provision for those learners who are already in these settings or who may require accommodation in settings requiring secure care or specialised programmes with high levels of support." This study therefore is poised to find out how the learner as an insider can inform both policy and pedagogic practices within the learning space of learners with hearing impairment.

In subsequent sections, the paper explores related literature to the study. The aim is to give an account of what other scholars have said about using narrative inquiry to bring their storied lives to their readers. In all, three studies will be reviewed. These researchers relate their own experiences and the stories of other people.[9] The research methodology follows, which declares the approach used in generating and analysing data. The researchers aim to reflect on how stories of the past help in understanding the present and pave the way for the future. Lastly, they tease out the conceptions of the researcher's learning experiences through their own analysis and understanding. They are persuaded

[3] Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala, "The Extent to Which Teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto Understand and Practice the Principles of a Full Service School" (University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, Wits School of Education, 2017),6.
[4] Meryl Glaser and Ermien Van Pletzen, "Inclusive Education for Deaf Students: Literacy Practices and South African Sign Language," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 30, no. 1 (2012): 25–37.
[5] Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*.
[6] *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*.
[7] Maximus Monaheng Sefotho, "Narratives of Differently Abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy" (University of Pretoria, 2013), 49.
[8] UNE The Salamanca Statement for Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. (Paris: UNESCO, 1994), 21.
[9] David Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 22, no. 1 (2000): 68–93; Mavis Anita Clarke, "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis" (University of Georgia, 2003); Sefotho, "Narratives of Differently Abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy."

that reflective studies of people's accounts of their learning experiences are the starting point in framing education policies. The final part of this paper offers some concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clarke carried out a research study on the learning and experiences of deaf learners which focused on analysing their understanding of their learning experiences.[10] The researcher focused on Black Deaf or hard-of-hearing adult male learners. The study also investigated how Black Deaf or hard-of-hearing learners define their identity and gave an account of the problems encountered by Black Deaf or hard-of-hearing learners in school. In generating data, the researcher interviewed six Black Deaf or hard-of-hearing adult male learners. The researcher was interested in finding the perspectives of their learning experiences as well as the meanings they attached to their experiences. The study is relevant for the current paper as it gives an account of learners' experiences, giving them a platform to voice out their understanding of their own experiences, their feelings, and perspectives of their learning experiences.

In line with the findings of the study under investigation, Clarke's study revealed how oppressive the system is as well as how it is failing to address learners' unique education needs.[11] Clarke further observed that this is the result of the dominant view of the social construction of disability.[12] The researcher proposed that to address the problems learners face, teachers must vary their teaching approaches and teaching strategies must be individualised. Furthermore, the researcher further noted that Deaf or hard-of-hearing learners receive little or no education at all.[13] Like Clarke's study, the current paper looks at the storied narratives of a learner who gives an account of his first-hand schooling experience. The study is relevant for the current paper in that it offered insight into how learners with hearing impairment understand their learning experiences. However, it differs from the current paper as it looked at the experiences of the learners, while the current paper evaluates how a learner reflects on his own learning experiences. The current study shoulders on Clarke's study to find out how a learner with a hearing impairment narrates his learning experiences in a mainstream class.

Sefotho conducted a study titled "Narratives of differently-abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy."[14] In the study, the researcher aimed to establish how the experiences of differently-abled persons could inform career guidance policy. The study further intended to investigate how differently-abled persons understand their experiences of career choice. Worth mentioning is that Sefotho observed that the Career Guidance Policy does not accommodate differently-abled persons.[15] Sefotho's study contributed to the body of knowledge in different ways:

- It advocated for a new understanding and perception of disability as a discourse of difference.
- The researcher believed that his study would inform the direction of education.
- The researcher was also hoping to find out how career guidance relates to disability.
- It highlighted issues of disability and career guidance, thus envisaged to be of great help to the differently abled persons and their families and communities at large.

It is important to emphasize that the current paper does not focus on evaluating the contributions of the aforementioned scholar. However, it provides a highlight of some of the contributions brought

[10] Clarke, "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis."
[11] Clarke, "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis."
[12] Clarke, "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis."
[13] Clarke, "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis."
[14] Sefotho, "Narratives of Differently Abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy."
[15] Sefotho, "Narratives of Differently Abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy," 17-18.

forward by Sefotho's study which focused on investigating the experiences of minority groups within the disability sphere.

Rier conducted a study on the missing voice of the critically ill: a medical sociologist's first-hand account.[16] In the study, the researcher gave a detailed account of his personal journey as an ICU patient. He reported about his experiences and how he kept the memories of the experiences by writing them in a notebook which formed the primary research for his study. The researcher posited that at first, the notebook was mainly for communication with nurses and doctors. However, those written accounts later became his primary data for analysis. The secondary data for the study came from the faxes exchanged between his wife, family and those who visited him during his stay in the hospital.[17]

It is worth mentioning that like the present study which gives an account of the researcher as an insider, Rier explained his own experiences, reflecting on all the emotions he went through while he was hospitalised.[18] He indicated that as a researcher, being ill "offers a priceless opportunity to engage in the most intimate manner possible, with the subject of one's life work."[19] For this reason, he gave a clear picture of the pain, suffering, and uncertainty and how he was losing his "authority and how the responsibility of home and work quickly and decisively fell away."[20] The study is relevant for the current paper as it gives an account of the researcher as an insider. The current paper analyses the reflections of a researcher with a hearing impairment about his experiences as a learner with a hearing impairment in a mainstream classroom. Likewise, Reir's study gave an account of a researcher reflecting on his experiences as a patient in the ICU unit. Reir's study differs from Mcilroy's account as the events took place in a hospital while Mcilroy's experiences happened in a school setting.[21] Rier suggested that "by capturing the voice of the critically ill, we could lay the foundation for a wider sociology of the critically ill patient."[22]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is framed under Sen's capabilities approach.[23] The core themes of this framework are capabilities and functions. Sen defines capabilities as "the various things a person may value doing or being."[24] Agency is central to the capabilities approach. Agency is defined as "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements are judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well."[25] This approach is adopted in this study as it speaks to the focus of the paper. The focus of the paper is to analyse the narratives of a learner with hearing impairment about his schooling experiences. What is noteworthy about this piece is that through all the painful schooling experiences he encountered, he (the learner) exercised his agency by making informed and reflective choices. It is worth mentioning that a person exercises his agency through choice.[26] Furthermore, this approach views agency as an individual's ability to pursue and achieve valuable goals. Therefore, agency and well-being are interwoven concepts: one cannot be without the other. It seems fitting to utilize the capabilities approach for this research study to address issues pertaining to the educational needs of learners with hearing impairment, their struggle to fit in mainstream classrooms as well as how teachers' attitudes and the choice of teaching approaches impact their learning experiences. Furthermore, the choice of this

[16] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account."
[17] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account."
[18] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account."
[19] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account," 72.
[20] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account," 72.
[21] G. Mcilroy, "An Oral Deaf Identity, '…but You Speak so Well!,'" in *Paper Presented at Symposium Paper for EHDI Conference* (Johannesburg : Emperors Palace, 2007).
[22] Rier, "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account," 88.
[23] Amartya K Sen, *Equality of What?* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980); Amartya Sen, "Capability and Well-Being73," *The Quality of Life* 30 (1993): 270–93.
[24] Amartya Sen, "Commodities and Capabilities," *OUP Catalogue*, 1999, 75.
[25] Sen, "Commodities and Capabilities," 19.
[26] Sen, "Commodities and Capabilities."

approach as a theoretical framework guiding this study is premised on a suited choice as it helps to understand:

- Language as a barrier to learning.
- Teachers' failure to understand identity struggle in learners with hearing impairment.
- Identity formation for learners with hearing impairment.
- The impact of low expectations, negative attitudes, and inappropriate teaching methods on learners with hearing impairment.

METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative research study anchored on the interpretive lenses of inquiry. To address research questions guiding this study, qualitative research was deemed necessary as the focus was on analysing the meanings attached to the learning experiences of a learner with hearing impairment.[27] Data used for the achievement of this study was a journal article by Mcilroy titled "An Oral Deaf Identity: But You Speak So Well."[28] The document was used as the primary data source as it was the starting point in gaining insights into how the learner gives an account of his learning experiences. The researchers read through the article to identify the themes which include challenges, the strategies employed to overcome the challenges encountered as well as teaching methods teachers employed. This data collection method is known as document analysis. According to Bowen, document analysis is a systemic procedure used to evaluate and review documents.[29] Mokala observes that "like any other analytical method in qualitative research, document analysis requires examination and interpretation of data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge."[30]

Narrative inquiry is a research process that brings the stories of people to the fore so that they can create meanings for their lived experiences. When conducting a narrative study, researchers tell their life stories. According to Connelly and Clandinin, people are storytelling organisms who, both individually and collectively, lead storied lives.[31] Thus, the study of a narrative is the study of the way humans experience the world. In other words, people's lives consist of stories. The narrator, therefore, takes a leading role in the story and uses the first personal pronoun. This brings out the presence of the learner in the story and the reader gets to understand better because everything relates to the first-hand experiences of the narrator. In their study on the Narratives of Personal Experience: The Construction of Identity in Basotho Accordion Songs, Phafoli and Zulu explain that "narrative occurs in the presence of a narrator who narrates something."[32] For this reason, in the research paper under review, the researcher narrates his learning experiences in a mainstream classroom, defining his identity. The researcher is thus seen as the narrator of his life story. The researcher, therefore, provides an account of his own learning experiences, as a learner with hearing impairment in a mainstream classroom. Through reflecting on past experiences, narratives help in making meaning of the present, and to be able to account for one's actions and how they influence life choices. Therefore, the current paper unpacks the experiences, by analysing how the narrator connects different parts of the story to provide a clear and continuous account of his learning experiences.

Conducting a narrative inquiry means researchers examine their own stories to understand their experiences. This means that they tell their stories and lived experiences that make meaning of who

---

[27] Ann R J Briggs, "Academic Writing," *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management. 3rd Edition: CA: Sage Publications*, 2012, 397–412.
[28] Mcilroy, "An Oral Deaf Identity, '…but You Speak so Well!'"
[29] Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.
[30] Mokala, "The Extent to Which Teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto Understand and Practice the Principles of a Full Service School," 22.
[31] F Michael Connelly and D Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2–14.
[32] Lehlohonolo S Phafoli and N S Zulu, "Narratives of Personal Experience: The Construction of Identity in Basotho Accordion Songs," *South African Journal of African Languages* 34, no. 2 (2014), 181.

they are. As Connelly and Clandinin articulate, "Narrative inquiry helps us to uncover the relationship in people's lives."[33] They further continue to explain that "storytelling is one of the reflective practices that researchers can use in trying to understand how their self-identity and professional identity is constructed and changes." [34] In the study under review, the researcher narrates his schooling experiences, reflecting on his past. As Connelly and Clandinin put it "people shape their daily lives by stories of who they are, and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories."[35] Thus, this paper makes use of Mcilroy's personal narrative.

The data design employed in this paper was a case study design. A case study design was preferred for its power to "adapt to a wide range of methodological frameworks such as life history, phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnographic research."[36] The study did not set out to compare the narratives of different learners with hearing impairment but to explore the storied narratives of one learner with a hearing impairment. For this reason, a single case study was deemed a suited option for this paper as the researchers sought an in-depth understanding of how a learner with a hearing impairment narrates his schooling experiences. In line with what Prasad suggests, content analysis was utilized in changing the recorded journal article as the primary data of this research study.[37] This is because Content Analysis is a qualitative data analysis strategy employed when researchers derive concepts, hence it was deemed as relevant for the present study. [38]

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of this paper is on analysing the experiences of a learner with hearing impairment in a mainstream classroom. In the study, the learner gave an account of his horrific experiences with some teachers, bringing to light first-hand experience of lack of support and inappropriate language of learning and teaching. Furthermore, the learner tells how some teachers employed teaching methodologies that were in line with his learning needs as a learner with hearing impairment. The analysis of the learner's experiences is presented as follows.

Being Deaf

In this category, the researchers explore how the learner understood himself. At first, he did not see himself as a deaf person, but rather as someone who is hearing impaired and using hearing aids.

> *"I was born deaf and have approximately 80db bilateral (severe) hearing loss. I wear hearing aids and with a digital aid and an analogue aid with which I can hear or comprehend voices particularly well. As a result, I rely on lipreading to supplement what I have missed. However, lipreading often lets me down…For I did not define myself as a Deaf person, but as hard of hearing/ or hearing impaired who relied on hearing aids and lipreading and notes."*

The researchers argue that identity formation was a challenge for the learner, and it took him a long time to define himself as a Deaf bilingual person.

The main reason could be that he was born in a family with hearing parents, and he never had any exposure to sign language or even the deaf community and he was never exposed to any deaf adult at an early age. It seems that lack of exposure to the Deaf culture could have had an influence on him not defining himself as deaf, rather, he defined himself as hearing impaired. Thus, he explains "I did not define myself as a deaf person but as hard of hearing/ or hearing impaired who relied on hearing aids

[33] Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry."
[34] Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," 2.
[35] Michael F Connelly and Jean D Clandinin, "Narrative Inquiry "in Judith L. Green, Gregory Camili and Patricia B. Elmore (Eds.) Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research" (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 479.
[36] A S De Vos et al., *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions* (Van Schaik Publishers, 2011),320. https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=M5GEnQAACAAJ.
[37] B Devi Prasad, "Content Analysis," *Research Methods for Social Work* 5 (2008): 1–20.
[38] P. Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, ed. Flick W., von Kardorff E., and Steinke I. (New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd, 2004), 159–76.

and lip-reading and notes." It is important to note that the learner was never exposed to any deaf adult or sign language in his schooling years as explained below, he only learnt the language after matric, hence he defined himself as a hearing-impaired person using hearing aids.

In the article, the learner mentions that there was a teacher who was deaf in school, but because the teacher had not accepted and embraced his deafness, he did not define himself as deaf and even insisted that he was a person with hearing loss. This could have given him (the learner) a chance to have exposure to the deaf world and a role model to look up to, instead, he had to negotiate identity formation on his own. For this reason, the learner explains that when people fail to identify themselves as deaf and cannot find a place where they belong, they resort to finding ways to fit in the hearing world. As much as he was aware that he was deaf from an early age, it was quite difficult for him to find a suitable community to fit into as he was constantly reminded that he could not hear, with remarks such as "Oh you speak so well…'' which he felt they omitted "for a deaf person…" It is interesting to note that he could tell from an early age that he was different from other kids.

Growing up in a hearing environment, the primary mode of communication was oral. To achieve this, he went through speech therapy, and he had to learn how to lip-read. The majority of deaf children have hearing parents and "this is one of the principal reasons why significant barriers to communication may exist between members of the deaf community and members of the mainstream society."[39] As a grounded deaf adult, the researcher sets forth that he identifies himself as bicultural deaf, defining himself as 'oral deaf.'[40] Adhering to a bicultural identity means that a person belongs to both the hearing and the deaf world. According to Sari, there are mainly three identity patterns among the deaf: cultural hearing identity, cultural deaf identity, and bicultural identity.[41] Accordingly Mcilroy claims and debates about identity progress around "the fluid post-modernist constructions and deconstructions of identity."[42]

It can be argued that his schooling years were grounded in a medical framework as he explains "I went to a mainstream private school where there was no Sign Language in the classroom or an interpreter for me." From the foregoing quote, the study reveals that the learner went to a mainstream classroom with no support services for learners with hearing impairment. This differs from the study by Reilly and Nguyen where the placement of learners with hearing impairment in a mainstream school was a success since the school had support services personnel such as audiologists.[43] Interestingly, Fuandai is of the opinion that for learners with hearing impairment to succeed in a mainstream school, specialists such as audiologists, therapists and sign language interpreters must work collaboratively to address their learning needs.[44]

DoE states that when learners enter a school in which the language of learning and training (LOLT) is not their home language, the educators of all learning programmes are expected to give support and supplementary learning in the LOLT until such a time that learners are able to learn effectively through that medium. In her study on the teachers' perceptions of their inclusive pedagogic practices in a Full-Service School, Mokala declares that "a further area of barriers arising from the

[39] Mieke Van Herreweghe and Myriam Vermeerbergen, "Deaf Perspectives on Communicative Practices in South Africa: Institutional Language Policies in Educational Settings," 2010, 126.
[40] G. Mcilroy, "Deaf Identities: A Range of Possibilities, Plenary Presentation at Mental Health and Deafness World Congress," in *Plenary Presentation at Mental Health and Deafness World Congress* (Worcester, Cape Town, South Africa., 2006).
[41] Hakan Sari, "An Analysis of the Relationship between Identity Patterns of Turkish Deaf Adolescents and the Communication Modes Used in Special Residential Schools for the Hearing Impaired and Deaf," *Deafness & Education International* 7, no. 4 (2005): 206–22.
[42] Mcilroy, "An Oral Deaf Identity, '…but You Speak so Well!'" 1.
[43] Charles Reilly and Nguyen Cong Khanh, "Inclusive Education for Hearing-Impaired and Deaf Children in Vietnam Pearl S. Buck International/Vietnam Final Evaluation Report" (US AID Grant, 2004).
[44] C Fuandai, "Catering for Children with Special Needs in the Regular Classroom: Challenges and the Way Forward," *Edo Journal of Counselling* 3, no. 1 (2010): 144–51.

curriculum are those which result from the medium of teaching and learning."[45] Teaching and learning for many learners take place in a language that is not their first language. According to Ntombela and Raymond for most children in South Africa, learning takes place through a second or even a third language.[46] Even worse many learners are taught by teachers who speak a language different from their own, or by teachers who are also struggling with the language of learning and teaching. Ntombela and Raymond in Mokala further maintain that there is a mismatch between learners' home language and the language of teaching and learning which has serious implications for learning.[47]

Also worth noting is that South African Sign Language is regarded as the first language for people with hearing impairment in South Africa. Furthermore, "Deaf people regard Sign Language as the core part of their culture and community."[48]Also, Stander and Mcilroy observe that as much as Sign Language is an important aspect for people with hearing impairment, "not all Deaf people use it and instead use the oral method or Total Communication."[49] This situation can be compared to the school in which the learner under investigation was attending where he never had a chance to use sign language until after matric. Having established problems related to language and identity, The next section discusses teachers' pedagogic practices and methodologies.

Teachers' Practices

One other barrier to learning as the author puts it, was the way some teachers presented their lessons. He explains:

> *"In prep/ primary I hated listening tests, spelling tests, comprehension tests and orals. I hated it with passion when teachers dictated notes to the class because I always came last and came home in tears because I could not hear."*

It can be depicted that teachers who could not address the needs of a learner with hearing impairment in their class were not equipped with the necessary skills in their tertiary training. This is in line with the findings of a study by Ntinda, Thwala, and Tfusi in which the respondents indicated that "their tertiary training institutions did not adequately prepare them to handle deaf and hard-of-hearing learners."[50] Another reason could be that teachers did not have a deep understanding of how they could better teach and accommodate a learner with a hearing impairment. This could be related to their perception of the learner, that because he was using hearing- aids he could hear; therefore, he did not need any modification in the way they structured their teaching methods. Ntinda, et al further explain that "…teachers of deaf and hard-of-hearing students have no innovative methods to use for the teaching of these students."[51]

One other aspect which was problematic for him was keeping up with classroom discussions. Oftentimes he would fall off especially when the whole class was having a debate or an open discussion which did not have order. He explains below:

---

[45] Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala, "Original Paper Breaking the Boundaries of Prescription: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Inclusive Pedagogic Practices in a Full Service School," *Journal of Education and Culture Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 77–92, 89.

[46] S Ntombela and E Raymond, "Inclusive Education in South Africa and Globally," *Making Inclusive Education Work in Classrooms*, 2013, 2–17.

[47] Ntombela and Raymond, "Inclusive Education in South Africa and Globally"; Mokala, "Original Paper Breaking the Boundaries of Prescription: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Inclusive Pedagogic Practices in a Full Service School."

[48] Marga Stander and Guy McIlroy, "Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School," *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam: Tydskrif Vir Taalaanleer* 33, no. 1 (2017): 83–99, 85.

[49] Stander and McIlroy, "Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School," 83.

[50] Kayi Ntinda and Bonginkhosi Tfusi, "Experiences of Teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students' in a Special Needs School: An Exploratory Study.," *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 7, no. 7 (2019): 79–89.

[51] Ntinda and Tfusi, "Experiences of Teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students' in a Special Needs School: An Exploratory Study," 86.

> *"I can recall another experience: in Grade 10 Life Orientation class. I remember being inquisitive about the topics such as relationships…and life and cultures etc. But within a few minutes of the lesson, I would often be lost because the topic would veer off into an open-ended discussion in the classroom and I would be left behind even though I sat at the front while the really interesting discussions of incidental learning bounced around the classroom behind me."*

The learner further explains;

> *"Thus, Deaf learners often miss out on learning about these essential life skills that happen incidentally in the form of informal teachers' conversations in classrooms that are easily acquired by hearing learners. Also, I have found that watching the teacher is not an effective enough way to learn these life skills because (oral) deaf learners usually miss the teachers' explanation to which hearing learners have full and easy access."*

The Department of Education stipulates that the history of special education and educational support services in South Africa is characterized by general inequalities within communities, with the majority of learners receiving inadequate support or no provision at all.[52] Additionally, specialised education and support services have predominantly been provided unequally among learners with disabilities.[53] Much of what has been written about the history of South African education, in general, indicates that prior to 1994, the education system was divided on racial grounds. Engelbrecht contends that prior to 1994, the schooling system was based on racial discrimination and a special needs education approach.[54] This was no exception in the education of learners with hearing impairment. "As a result, the post-apartheid government was faced with an inheritance of multi-layered inequalities, which have led to diverse needs of the learner population today."[55]

One of the reasons that the other teachers could not make use of teaching methods that accommodate a learner with hearing impairment in their class may stem from the fact that "they have limited knowledge and experience to provide learning accommodations and modifications for students with learning disabilities.[56] Furthermore, a lack of professional competency to adapt and differentiate curriculum "has significant implications for the educational success …" Subban and Mahlo take this argument further that teachers who fail to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning lack adequate knowledge and expertise to do so.[57] This is usually the population of teachers who received their training prior to 1994 in which the education system was using the medical model. For this reason, their training was limited as it did not equip them to deal with a diverse learner population with diverse learning needs.

Post 1994, the South African education system experienced a new dawn with the introduction of inclusive education. In line with the global movements on inclusive education, the White Paper 6 on Special Needs education was introduced as the founding document guiding the implementation of an inclusive education framework in South Africa. The document is focused on addressing the right to education for all. The DoE echoes that every disabled child has a right to education and training.[58]

---

[52] Department of Education, *Quality Education for All. Report of the NCSNET and NCESS* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1997).
[53] Department of Education, *Quality Education for All. Report of the NCSNET and NCESS*.
[54] P. Engelbrecht, *Inclusive Education in Action* (Pretoria: Van Schaick, 1999).
[55] Mokala, "The Extent to Which Teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto Understand and Practice the Principles of a Full Service School," 6.
[56] Sari Rudiyati, Pujaningsih Pujaningsih, and Mumpuniarti Mumpuniarti, "Teacher Knowledge and Experience Dealing with Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Elementary School and Implications to Learning Accommodation and Modification," in *1st Yogyakarta International Conference on Educational Management/Administration and Pedagogy (YICEMAP 2017)* (Atlantis Press, 2017), 274.
[57] Pearl Subban and Dikeledi Mahlo, "'My Attitude, My Responsibility 'Investigating the Attitudes and Intentions of Pre-Service Teachers toward Inclusive Education between Teacher Preparation Cohorts in Melbourne and Pretoria," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 21, no. 4 (2017): 441–61.
[58] Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*.

Mokala supports that "…the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System is the first official document that introduced inclusive education as a discourse and policy in South Africa."[59]

Research shows that children with hearing impairment struggle to acquire a spoken language.[60] This is because they rely more heavily on visual processing than auditory information processing. As a result, it is imperative that when dealing with learners with hearing impairment, teachers must make use of more visual learning materials. It seems evident that many teachers failed to support the learner. Their teaching methods were not accommodating, and he had to find his own coping strategies to be in line with his peers. This confirms the views of Engelbrecht et al and Watson, Powers, and Gregory that in mainstream classrooms, teachers fail to accommodate learners facing barriers to learning.[61] Walton and Lloyd blame this on the lack of appropriate pre-and in-service training and preparation for inclusive classrooms.[62] This constrains the implementation of inclusive education. In their study, Engelbrecht, Nel and Tlale have shown that teachers who are able to address diverse learners' needs and accommodate diverse learner populations in their classes show a positive attitude towards such learners and their classroom environment tends to be more positive.[63]

This section has focused on giving a detailed discussion of teachers' practices and how they impacted further forming barriers to learning for a learner with hearing impairment. The forthcoming section will elaborate on teachers' understanding.

Teachers' understanding

It seems that teachers' understanding of and experience in teaching learners with hearing impairment has a great impact on how discriminating or accommodating their teaching practices can be to learners with hearing impairment. According to Rudiyati et. al, the way teachers prepare and implement the learning strategy is developed on the basic knowledge and experiences of teachers and they also have limited knowledge about learners' needs.[64] The extract below explains clearly how discriminating teachers' practices can be.

> *"I remember a bad experience in a Grade 7 English Class. The teacher was trying to get me to say a paragraph from a novel with great gusto and with emotion just as he read it out to the class… the problem was that he did not know and understand that even with hearing aids, I still could not hear the difference in tones so I did not understand what he was trying to get me to do… This was such a humiliating experience that could have been avoided if he knew more about being deaf (and I hated his class after that day and sat at the back!"*

This statement shows that when teachers do not understand the kind of learners they are dealing with, they end up humiliating and making their school experiences miserable. One can assume that the teacher did not understand how to address the language needs of the learner and incorporate different teaching strategies to accommodate him.

This may probably be linked to the fact that the teacher was not aware of inclusive education practices where diversity is at the heart of the learner population. Mokala contends that "inclusive

---

[59] Mokala, "The Extent to Which Teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto Understand and Practice the Principles of a Full Service School," 6.

[60] Van Herreweghe and Vermeerbergen, "Deaf Perspectives on Communicative Practices in South Africa: Institutional Language Policies in Educational Settings."

[61] Petra Engelbrecht et al., "How Cultural Histories Shape South African and Finnish Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: A Comparative Analysis," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 28, no. 3 (2013): 305–18; Linda Watson, Stephen Powers, and Susan Gregory, *Deaf and Hearing Impaired Pupils in Mainstream Schools* (Routledge, 2013).

[62] Elizabeth Walton, "From Clinic to Classroom: A Model of Teacher Education for Inclusion," *Perspectives in Education* 30, no. 2 (2012): 62–70.

[63] Petra Engelbrecht et al., "Enacting Understanding of Inclusion in Complex Contexts: Classroom Practices of South African Teachers," *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 3 (2015).

[64] Rudiyati, Pujaningsih, and Mumpuniarti, "Teacher Knowledge and Experience Dealing with Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Elementary School and Implications to Learning Accommodation and Modification."

classrooms by nature are made of diverse learners, considering that diversity is one of the key characteristics of inclusive education, as it aims at addressing the diverse needs of learners, be it because of race, culture or disability."[65] It seems that the teacher did not understand what it entails to have a learner with hearing impairment in his class. For this reason, his limited knowledge of such issues led him to exclude and even discriminate against the learner. As stipulated by the White Paper (DoE, 2001, p. 16), it seems that the teacher lacked the understanding that "all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience."[66] This could be attributed to the inappropriate and inadequate tertiary training he received while training to be a teacher.

LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to the reflections of one scholar; thus, the finding, therefore, may not be an accurate representation of the experiences of all learners with hearing impairment in South Africa. It is important that research with a larger population be conducted to help understand better the lived experiences of learners with hearing impairment in mainstream classrooms in South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on learners' experiences in mainstream classes. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Department of Education should revise the placement of learners with hearing impairment in mainstream classes where resources are not adequate and do not meet their language needs. The study also recommends that SASL must be amongst the languages that teachers must take as compulsory at teacher training institutions to prepare them for the world of work. Lastly, the study recommends that mainstream schools that accommodate learners with hearing impairment must provide ongoing training to equip teachers with the necessary means to accommodate and embrace learners with hearing impairment in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The current paper focused on analysing a reflective study of a learner who narrates his schooling experiences as a learner with hearing impairment in a mainstream classroom. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the researchers have discussed their own understanding of what these experiences could mean and what could have been the reasons behind different events. The study has therefore revealed that lack of understanding of deaf education, inappropriate teaching methodologies, and a mismatch between the LOLT are some of the driving forces behind the horrific learning experiences of the learner under investigation. The researchers hope that this paper will form a basis for more research on learners' experiences to throw more light on how teachers can best identify and address their learning needs, especially learners with hearing impairment as the field needs more attention, especially within the South African education system. The study recommends further research on the storied narratives of learners with hearing impairments. The findings of such studies could guide teachers in using appropriate teaching methods that address the needs of learners with hearing impairment. The results could further help in removing all barriers to learning which stem from lack of understanding about the nature of hearing impairment and inappropriate language in teaching and learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bowen, Glenn A. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

Briggs, Ann R J. "Academic Writing." *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management. 3rd Edition: CA: Sage Publications*, 2012, 397–412.

[65] Mokala, "Original Paper Breaking the Boundaries of Prescription: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Inclusive Pedagogic Practices in a Full Service School,"82.

[66] Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*.

Clarke, Mavis Anita. "Learning and Schooling Experiences of Black Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adult Male Learners: A Narrative Analysis." University of Georgia, 2003.

Connelly, F Michael, and D Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2–14.

Connelly, Michael F, and Jean D Clandinin. "„Narrative Inquiry "in Judith L. Green, Gregory Camili and Patricia B. Elmore (Eds.) Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research." Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Government Gazette, 1996.

Department of Education. *Quality Education for All. Report of the NCSNET and NCESS*. Pretoria: Government Printers, 1997.

Education, South Africa. Department of. *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. Department of Education Pretoria, 2001.

Engelbrecht, P. *Inclusive Education in Action*. Pretoria: Van Schaick, 1999.

Engelbrecht, Petra, Mirna Nel, Norma Nel, and Dan Tlale. "Enacting Understanding of Inclusion in Complex Contexts: Classroom Practices of South African Teachers." *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 3 (2015).

Engelbrecht, Petra, Hannu Savolainen, Mirna Nel, and Olli-Pekka Malinen. "How Cultural Histories Shape South African and Finnish Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: A Comparative Analysis." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 28, no. 3 (2013): 305–18.

Fuandai, C. "Catering for Children with Special Needs in the Regular Classroom: Challenges and the Way Forward." *Edo Journal of Counselling* 3, no. 1 (2010): 144–51.

Glaser, Meryl, and Ermien Van Pletzen. "Inclusive Education for Deaf Students: Literacy Practices and South African Sign Language." *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 30, no. 1 (2012): 25–37.

Herreweghe, Mieke Van, and Myriam Vermeerbergen. "Deaf Perspectives on Communicative Practices in South Africa: Institutional Language Policies in Educational Settings," 2010.

Mayring, P. "Qualitative Content Analysis." In *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, edited by Flick W., von Kardorff E., and Steinke I., 159–76. New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd, 2004.

Mcilroy, G. "An Oral Deaf Identity, '…but You Speak so Well!'" In *Paper Presented at Symposium Paper for EHDI Conference*. Johannesburg : Emperors Palace, 2007.

———. "Deaf Identities: A Range of Possibilities, Plenary Presentation at Mental Health and Deafness World Congress." In *Plenary Presentation at Mental Health and Deafness World Congress*. Worcester, Cape Town, South Africa., 2006.

Mokala, Ntsoaki Teresa. "Original Paper Breaking the Boundaries of Prescription: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Inclusive Pedagogic Practices in a Full Service School." *Journal of Education and Culture Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 77–92.

———. "The Extent to Which Teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto Understand and Practice the Principles of a Full Service School." University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, Wits School of Education, 2017.

Ntinda, Kayi, and Bonginkhosi Tfusi. "Experiences of Teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students' in a Special Needs School: An Exploratory Study." *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 7, no. 7 (2019): 79–89.

Ntombela, S, and E Raymond. "Inclusive Education in South Africa and Globally." *Making Inclusive Education Work in Classrooms*, 2013, 2–17.

Phafoli, Lehlohonolo S, and N S Zulu. "Narratives of Personal Experience: The Construction of Identity in Basotho Accordion Songs." *South African Journal of African Languages* 34, no. 2 (2014): 181–93.

Prasad, B Devi. "Content Analysis." *Research Methods for Social Work* 5 (2008): 1–20.

Reilly, Charles, and Nguyen Cong Khanh. "Inclusive Education for Hearing-Impaired and Deaf Children in Vietnam Pearl S. Buck International/Vietnam Final Evaluation Report." US AID Grant, 2004.

Rier, David. "The Missing Voice of the Critically Ill: A Medical Sociologist's First-person Account." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 22, no. 1 (2000): 68–93.

Rudiyati, Sari, Pujaningsih Pujaningsih, and Mumpuniarti Mumpuniarti. "Teacher Knowledge and Experience Dealing with Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Elementary School and Implications to Learning Accommodation and Modification." In *1st Yogyakarta International Conference on Educational Management/Administration and Pedagogy (YICEMAP 2017)*, 272–78. Atlantis Press, 2017.

Sari, Hakan. "An Analysis of the Relationship between Identity Patterns of Turkish Deaf Adolescents and the Communication Modes Used in Special Residential Schools for the Hearing Impaired and Deaf." *Deafness & Education International* 7, no. 4 (2005): 206–22.

Sefotho, Maximus Monaheng. "Narratives of Differently Abled Persons: Informing Career Guidance Policy." University of Pretoria, 2013.

Sen, A K. *Equality of What?* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980.

Sen, Amartya. "Capability and Well-Being73." *The Quality of Life* 30 (1993): 270–93.

———. "Commodities and Capabilities." *OUP Catalogue*, 1999.

Stander, Marga, and Guy McIlroy. "Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School." *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam: Tydskrif Vir Taalaanleer* 33, no. 1 (2017): 83–99.

Subban, Pearl, and Dikeledi Mahlo. "'My Attitude, My Responsibility 'Investigating the Attitudes and Intentions of Pre-Service Teachers toward Inclusive Education between Teacher Preparation Cohorts in Melbourne and Pretoria." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 21, no. 4 (2017): 441–61.

UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca Statement for Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Paris: UNESCO.

Vos, A S De, H Strydom, C B Fouché, and C S L Delport. *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. Van Schaik Publishers, 2011. https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=M5GEnQAACAAJ.

Walton, Elizabeth. "From Clinic to Classroom: A Model of Teacher Education for Inclusion." *Perspectives in Education* 30, no. 2 (2012): 62–70.

Watson, Linda, Stephen Powers, and Susan Gregory. *Deaf and Hearing Impaired Pupils in Mainstream Schools*. Routledge, 2013.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala holds a PhD in Inclusive Education from the University of Johannesburg, an M. Ed in Inclusive Education from University of the Witwatersrand, a B. Ed. Hon and PGDE in Learner Support and Psychology of Education from the University of the Free State and a B. Ed. degree from National University of Lesotho. She writes and presents widely on issues of language education, African culture, women and culture, multilingualism, translanguaging, inclusive education, diversity in classrooms, teaching home languages in multilingual settings, teacher training, as well as linguistic diversity in classrooms.

Prof. Maximus Monaheng Sefotho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology (with a specialization/focus on Career Guidance and Disability) at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His research and teaching work focuses on Career Choice/Construction within the sphere of Contemporary Careers: Protean and Boundaryless as well as hephapreneurship (A concept he coined). He was the first registered member of the South African Career Development Association (SACDA), which he serves as board member up to this day. He has contributed in the development of the competency framework for career development practitioners and currently has developed an interest in the transition of differently abled persons from home through to the world of work. His later work has emphasised an Afrocentric approach that is driven by the philosophy of Ubuntu. In search of an Ubuntu Model of Career Development,

Prof. Sefotho interrogates harmonising Ubuntu with Euro-Western models in addressing equity, social justice and avoiding harmful beneficence.