

ABSTRACT

This study sought to conduct a narrative inquiry of the journey and educational experiences of Deaf learners and their teachers at a high school for the Deaf in Swaziland. As a researcher, I had observed that the education of the Deaf population has been scrutinized, defined and dominated by the hearing population without giving the Deaf population a 'voice' to narrate their educational needs as well as their educational experiences. This study sought to address the following research questions: What are the educational experiences of Deaf learners in the School for the Deaf - High in Swaziland? What experiences do hearing teachers of the Deaf encounter in teaching Deaf students in Swaziland? What experience does the researcher as a teacher and a school principal encounter in teaching Deaf students? What experiences do School for the Deaf-Primary administrators encounter in teaching and learning of Deaf students? Thus, the main objective of this study was to seek viewpoints of the educational experiences of Deaf students, their teachers and that of primary school administrators as people who walked the journey with the students from primary school. The study comprised four Deaf students who had completed Grade 12, six teachers who taught these students at secondary level and two primary school administrators who taught these students at primary level.

The study employed Freire's critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework in a bid to answer the above research questions. Freire's critical pedagogy is premised on the notion of liberation and it encourages that students, like the Deaf students in this study, should be involved in a dialogue with teachers and school administrators on issues that pertain to their education so that their voices can be heard. Students who are involved in such dialogues become liberated, learn to think critically and develop critical consciousness which helps them to improve their education and their life conditions in general (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011, p. 77). The study used in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants and the researcher's autoethnography to collect data. My own experience as a teacher and the first principal of School for the Deaf-High was presented as an autoethnography in this study. The writing of autoethnography enabled me as a researcher and the school principal to articulate and connect my personal educational experiences to those of Deaf students, teachers and primary school administrators.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research methodology was employed in this study in order to collect, present and analyze data from the participants. Data collected

were analyzed according to IPA data analysis stages which include looking for themes, coding and connecting themes. Data were presented under the following broad thematic categories: Self and Identity, School and Communication, Family Involvement and Encouragement, and Improving Deaf Education. Education policy documents which legalize general education and issues related to the education of learners with learning disabilities in the country, were also reviewed in order to locate the study within the education context of Swaziland. The findings of the study revealed Deaf students' resilience in education. Deaf students' experienced challenges which included failure, repeating classes and more years added so that they were able to complete the content in preparation for external examination. However, they managed to pass their Grade 12 examination and received certificates. It is also found that the use of special curriculum and special examination at primary level and lack of signs for abstract concepts being taught at school, is a challenge to Deaf students and their teachers. The general curriculum which is used is not adapted to suit the needs of Deaf students and it has a lot of hearing aspects which are not friendly to Deaf students. It was also found that Deaf students do not have any home language that is being taught as a subject. They are only taught English as a second language. My autoethnography also revealed the importance of introducing sign language as a subject in schools for the Deaf so that Deaf students are also examined in their first language like their hearing counterparts. It is therefore recommended that, in order to improve educational experiences of Deaf students, their teachers and that of school administrators in Schools for the Deaf in the country, they should be given an opportunity to tell their stories. The stories they tell, reflect what actually goes on in their teaching and learning in the classroom, especially the stories of Deaf students as people who are directly affected by the education system in the country. The study also concluded by making other recommendations which may improve Deaf education in Swaziland.

Keywords

Dialogue, liberation, critical thinking, critical consciousness, curriculum, Deaf education