

Teaching Deaf Learners in Kenyan Classrooms

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Abstract

This thesis examines the teaching and learning of deaf primary-school learners in Kenya in order to explain their poor examination performance and to find ways of better supporting their learning. While language and communication are perceived as the main problems encountered by deaf children, it is assumed that if teachers and learners are able to communicate through sign language, deaf learners can learn. The main argument of this thesis is that although proficiency in sign language among teachers does play a great role in the education of deaf learners, it is not sufficient in offering quality education in this context. Other needs of deaf learners should be addressed during the teaching and learning process through appropriate teaching and learning materials and teaching and assessment approaches. The thesis reviews literature looking at the relationship between language, thought and learning in the education of deaf learners. The study was partly informed by Vygotsky's theory of social learning and language which recognises that children learn through their interaction with the social environment. A discussion on the difference between the concepts: 'special education', 'integration', and 'inclusive education' is raised in the review of literature leading to the discussion of whether deaf learners require 'special' pedagogy. Different views have been held regarding the type of pedagogical approach used in the teaching and learning of deaf learners in Kenya who learn in specialist units attached to mainstream schools: whether this is 'special', integrated or inclusive education. The research took an exploratory approach and focused on the teaching and learning of Social Studies in specialist units in urban and remote rural areas in Kenya. Data were collected mainly through lesson observations and semi-structured interviews with deaf and hearing education stakeholders including learners, teachers, education officials and representatives of deaf people's organisations. Kenyan Sign Language and English were the main languages used in data collection. The study found that although textbooks were mostly available for learners in the units, they did not benefit from them due to their design which did not respond to their learning needs. However, some textbook design features that would benefit the learners were identified by the deaf teachers and learners. In addition, while deaf teachers did not generally encounter communication problems in teaching, most hearing teachers lacked sufficient proficiency in Kenyan Sign Language (the language of instruction), a phenomenon that affected dialogue in teaching,. Assessment practices seemed not to be suitable for deaf learners to express what they knew. Although teaching and learning took place in sign language, assessment was through reading and writing in English. A combination of a general quality improvement of educational resources which would be relevant for all learners and some deaf-specific interventions for deaf learners is an approach that would support deaf learners to achieve more in their learning. Recognising the expert knowledge of deaf teachers gained from their experiences

as teachers and formerly as deaf learners, and their proficiency in sign language would contribute towards providing the learners with opportunities to learn more.

Full text: http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/38450/1/Kimani,_Cecilia_W..pdf