

**Research Article**

## **Investigating Classroom Teaching Strategies Used in the Learning of Deafblind Learners in Selected Special Schools of Southern Province, Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

The study sought to investigate classroom teaching strategies used in the learning of deafblind learners in selected special schools of southern province of Zambia. The objectives of the study were; to establish the instructional methods used by the teachers teaching learners with deafblindness; to analyze the curriculum adaptations used for learners with deafblindness; to investigate the available teaching resources for learners with deafblindness; to determine the benefits of stakeholder (parental) collaboration on the teaching of learners with deafblindness. The case study was preferred in order to allow an in-depth study of the classroom strategies used for learners with deafblindness. Qualitative methods were used to collect data. Simple random and purposive sampling was used to select the sample. Interview guide and focus group discussion guide were used to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. With regards to objective one, instructional methods the findings were that the teachers were applying some instructional strategies during the teaching of learners with deafblindness such as task analysis, repetition drill and coactive teaching but negatively one to one, peer tutoring and prompting were not used because the teachers lacked knowledge on how they were to be used. With regards to objective two curriculum adaptation, the study established that, despite teachers trained in special education were not conversant with the concept of curriculum adaptation for deafblind learners. Majority in this study showed that they did not understand the concept of adaptation for deafblind learners. In addition to what was discovered, few teachers were able to apply some strategies of adapting the curriculum. In line with objective three, the available resources such as diagrams, tactile, graphs, auditor devices, assistive devices needed for deafblind learners were used. Challenges were that teachers, education standards officers, head teachers and parents on deafblind education were not conversant on the appropriate teaching resources to be used due to lack of training on deafblind education. With regards to stakeholder's involvement, it was established that a challenge was seen with language barrier between parents and their deafblind children. It was also observed that most parents were unable to visit the schools of their deafblind children in order to appreciate the education that was being given to the deafblind learners, travelling expenses by parents and lack of commitment towards the education of deafblind learners. The recommendations were that, ministry of education to incorporate teacher training colleges in order to provide deafblind education, strengthen multi-disciplinary teams from provincial level to the school level. Increase awareness on deafblind education in communities. Provide school platform for families to be involved in the education of their deafblind children.

**Keywords:** Deafblind Education, Classroom Instructions, Stakeholder's Involvement, Parental Involvement, Curriculum Adaptation, Peer Tutoring.

### **1. Introduction**

Vision and hearing are major senses through which people gain information about the world in order to learn, function and interact with others. Individuals with deafblindness are not able to access this essential visual and auditory information in a clear and consistent way (Understanding Deafblindness, Issues, Perspectives and Strategies-Alsop, 2002). An individual who is deafblind is one who has a combined loss of vision and hearing. Neither vision nor hearing can be used as a primary source of accessing information (The Canadian Deafblind and Rubella Association, 1995). This is a functional definition, based on the combined

effects of the losses rather than on a specific degree of loss to one or the other of the senses. The two sensory losses multiply and intensify the impact of one another, creating a severe disability which is unique. A combined loss gives a person a distorted picture of the world and leads to immense difficulties in communication, mobility, learning, and interaction. All those with deafblindness experience sensory deprivation, and are isolated from the world to varying degrees. Each person requires a unique educational approach—a range of learning opportunities and a variety of teaching modalities (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactual) in an accessible environment—in order to ensure he/she has the opportunity to reach his/her full potential. The challenge for each individual is to make sense of the world using the limited information that can be accessed. Historians and educationists globally have described deafblindness by examining its roots in the fields of blindness, deafness and multiple disabilities (Hart, 2016).

Deafblindness is a unique field because it tries to meet the complex communication and programming needs of individuals with very diverse conditions. Sense International India (2014) define deafblindness as a unique disability that combines sight and hearing loss, affecting a person's ability to communicate, to access all kinds of information and to get around. Although the term deafblind implies a complete absence of hearing and sight, most children who are considered deafblind have some functional vision (National Consortium on Deafblindness, 2007). Definitions of deafblindness vary around the world and there is universal recognition of the deleterious effects that dual sensory impairments have on access to environmental information, as well as acknowledgment that this unique disability requires specific teaching strategies to abet and support learning. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, PL 101-476, defines infants, toddlers, children and youth who are deafblind as having auditory and visual impairments, the combination of which creates such severe communication and other developmental and learning needs that they cannot be appropriately educated in special education programs solely for children and youth with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or severe disabilities, without supplementary assistance to address their educational needs due to these dual concurrent disabilities. It is important to note that the majority of learners who are deafblind have some residual use of either or both of the distance senses—vision and hearing. Other learners may have no usable vision or hearing. Some may have additional challenges, including physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities.

Although learners who are deafblind are a heterogeneous population, they all share communication challenges and the potential isolating effects of combined vision and hearing losses. Deafblindness is not the sum total of a vision loss plus a hearing loss. The combination of these sensory losses, to whatever degree, or in combination with additional disabilities, creates highly unique challenges. Vision and hearing interrelate to connect people with the world and are the primary avenues through which most people learn. Vision and hearing act as the prime motivators of social interactions. At the heart of the following knowledge and skills statements are infants, children and youth who are deafblind and their families. Teaching strategies are the methods used to allow learners to access the information being taught. The teaching strategies determine the approach a teacher may take to achieve learning objectives (Turnbull *et al.*, 2014). The methods used in any learning situation are primarily dictated by the learning objectives decided upon by the course developers. In many cases, combinations of methods are used to facilitate the learning experiences (Hosken, 2018). The research specifically sought to instructional methods used by the teachers teaching learners with deafblindness, the curriculum adaptations used for learners with deafblindness, available teaching resources for learners with deafblindness, the benefits of stakeholder (parental) collaboration on the teaching of learners with deafblindness.

## **2. Methodology**

A research design is the blue print used when conducting the study that maximizes control over factors that could interfere with the validity of the findings. Trochim *et al.*, (2015) indicates that a research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. In this study a case study design was preferred in order to allow an in-depth study of the classroom strategies used for learners with deafblindness. The design helped to understand, in detail, on what strategies were put in place in a classroom of learners with deafblindness by using qualitative methods. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained using interview and face to face interview while secondary data was sourced from the internet, journals and books. The study population consisted of provincial special education standards officer (SESO), education standards officer in special education (ESO), head teachers, special education teachers, from the schools where deafblind learners were found in southern province. Parents of children with deafblind learners were also part of the targeted population. The study sample comprised of twenty (20) participants: one (1) SESO special, three (3) ESO-special, six (6) parents, seven (7) class teachers, three (3) head teachers from study schools. The participants were considered necessary to the study as they were the ones who

were closely involved in the provision of education for deafblind learners. In this regard, purposive sampling was employed when sampling SESO, ESO special, head teachers, teachers and simple random sampling for parents.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the RockView University. The letters was then presented to the relevant officers and permission was granted to the researcher to carry out the research. Interviews were conducted with SESO, ESO's-special, school head teachers and parents. A focus group discussion was carried out for selected seven (7) class teachers who were handling learners with deaf blindness. Before engaging respondents to the data collection procedures, informed consent was obtained by explaining the aim of the research and seeking permission from all the relevant office. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded, with permission from the participants.

Reliability and validity call for trustworthiness for the study was used. The study adopted a member check approach in order to avoid researcher bias, the participants were asked to verify the data collected before it was processed so as to make the study reliable and valid. Cohen *et al.*, (2015) define triangulation as an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint. The cross-checking of data through multiple method approach made the data collected reliable. Therefore in this case during the study triangulation was used. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data qualitatively. Kombo and Tromp (2016), theme refers to topics or major subjects that come up in discussions. Responses to open-ended questions were recorded and then grouped into categories or themes that emerged. Before beginning analyzing the data, coding of the information was done. Creswell (2019) indicates the stages of coding as: open coding, axial-coding and sequential coding. The coding required the researcher to read over the transcribed script several times, focusing on recurring and consistent ideas that were found within participants' responses. Using different colored highlighters, each common idea was highlighted in one colour, which was called open coding. Sequential coding was applied by grouping the themes according to objectives and present descriptively. The study considered all possible and potential ethical issues. Informed consent was obtained from both the participants and the people in charge of the places where the research was carried out. As rightly pointed out by Wimmer and Dominick (1994), the principle of confidentiality and respect was the most important ethical issue requiring compliance on the part of a researcher. Participants were assured of high levels of confidentiality by not sharing their responses to any other person. During the research, participants' responses were neither be interfered with nor contested by the researcher. All participants received equal treatment. Participants were allowed to withdraw if at any point they were uncomfortable to proceed with the interview. In other words, the interview was carried out on voluntary basis.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The findings are presented in line with themes, guided by the objectives as follows: Instructional method used for teaching learners with deafblindness; Curriculum adaptations put in place for learners with deafblindness; the available teaching resources for learners with deafblindness; the available stakeholder (parental) collaboration support services for learners with deafblindness. The results and their corresponding discussion are as follows.

#### **3.1. Instructional Method Used for Teaching Learners with Deafblindness**

##### **3.1.1. Task Analysis**

The participants interviewed agreed that some instructional methods were important teaching methods to learners with deafblindness. Among the methods agreed upon were task analysis; the participants were quick to mention that task analysis was a very important aspect to both learners with disabilities and those without, this was because learners would understand the concept better and would follow instructions to the latter. Further participants agreed that, topic were to be given in smaller steps in order for the learners to grasp the concept better. This was in line with Kulombe *et al.*, (2018) who indicated that, basing on the severity of the child's disability; concepts were to be broken down into smaller teachable units for understanding to be enhanced. On the other hand, it was agreed that task analysis was helping parents' involvement in the education of deafblind. Parents were to be oriented on how to task analyzed work including the home chores. This was in line with Browder *et al.*, (2018) who explained that; task analysis was an evidence-based practice that promoted independence and instruction in inclusive settings. Further, Browder *et al.*, (2018) elaborated that; although task analysis had an extensive history in the field of special education, recent research extended the application to both teachers and students, a pro-active approach, and promoted self-monitoring. When students with extensive support needs were provided tools to self-monitor and self-prompt their academic independence increase.

One participant echoed that:

*"As for me I would agree with what my friend has said. At our school the head teacher encourages to try as much as possible to collaborate and assist deafblind learners. So from what he has stated we sit to plan and prepare the materials as well".*

The participants supplementary agreed that; the use and function of task analysis in special education was becoming the most proposed instructional system for teaching children and adults with learning problems. In general, the term task analysis had acquired a myriad of definition and meaning that lacked precision, therefore it would be imperative that teachers continue to use task analysis in the teaching of DB learners. Accompanying to that effect, there has been policy that requires all learners with or without disabilities to learn in a class and enhance accessibility, participation and achievement, therefore encouraging teachers for DB learners to task analyze their activities to ensure implementation was done. This was in line with Zambian Policy in the Education Curriculum Framework (2015) which is indicated that learning institutions should ensure that learners with special educational needs were provided with appropriate resources for quality learning. Children with special educational would require adapted curriculum relevant to their disabilities.

### **3.2. Chaining**

The participants who were interviewed agreed that chaining was a sub-skill which reinforced in a sequence to enable the learner to perform more complex behaviors. This was used in a huge range of situations, both for children and adults with disabilities.

One participant had categorically described chaining methods as instructional techniques use to teach complex behaviors by breaking them down into individual steps and these methods were particularly valuable when working with learners who have disabilities.

During a focus group discussion it was agreed that chaining was an important method that the participants used during teaching of deafblind learners. Comprehensively this was in line with Kulombe *et al.*, (2018) who explained how teachers use chaining at Chisombezi deafblind center by prompting the child to complete the task and for mastery, the activity was to be done both forward and backwards.

One participant narrated that:

*"Chaining has proven to be very effective for DB learners because it's a sequence kind of approach and a child may not miss a step. It's for this reason that I use chaining as part of instructional strategy".*

However some participants also indicated that, it was difficult to use chaining to severe deafblind learners.

One participant indicated that:

*"Chaining isn't fashionable to special needs learners; it's a useful technique applicable to anyone. It's particularly useful for tasks with multiple distinct elements that must be followed in a specific sequence. Imagine teaching someone to brush the teeth from scratch-each action, from finding tooth brush, tooth paste and getting water available must be described step by step".*

Therefore some participants were not keen in using chaining as an instructional technique particularly to severe deafblind learners.

### **3.3. Prompting Method**

Prompting as a method is often used when teaching children new skills in order to complete the skill. Many times different prompts are used together to help a child learn a new skill or complete a targeted response. The participants were interviewed on how prompting was being used, the response was that this type of instructional method was not often used because it was not known to be an effective method especially for the deafblind learners. This was not in line with MacDuff, (2018) which gave the importance of prompts as beneficial when teaching children new skills but in order for the child to become fully independent in the skill, the prompts need to decrease over time until they are no longer needed.

One participant mentioned that;

*"We really do not understand how prompting can help DB learners as a strategy. So basically it is not used as a strategy. Maybe a by the way kind of arrangement not that it is followed to the latter".*

In addition to that some administrators also indicated that they did not understand much about prompting and hence they never saw the need to emphasize it during the lessons among teachers handling DB learners.

### **3.4. Coactive Method**

From the use of coactive method to DB learners, participants unanimously agreed that the following aspects were used in teaching DB learners. Firstly, hand-under-hand approach which provided physical support during tasks. Basically that helped learners understand movements, textures, and spatial relationships. For example, teaching learner plate and how it looks like as well as a sign. Such would be applied. Further participants agreed that; tactile communication was used by touching as a foundation for communication.

One participant said that:

*"As teachers we try to introduce signals, gestures, or physical objects to facilitate interaction. We also support learners in expressing themselves more effectively which included the use of symbols, signs, or other communication systems".*

The participants also agreed that; that early communication practices were cardinal to help in understanding how communication develops and in turn practice for a child who is deafblind. Further, the participants agreed that incorporating other senses was being applied. This meant that for most children with deafblindness who may have residual hearing and vision enhanced learning, by pairing tactile strategies with other senses such as smell, taste, and proprioception.

Nonetheless, the participants were quick to indicate that individual differences and using different approaches were essential. This was in line with Rodriguez-Gil and Belote (2023) who added that; coactive signing involved taking the child's hands and, in a respectful way, molding the child's hands through the signs, in order to help the child make the signs.

The purpose of coactive signing is to teach the child a new sign or one that he or she is in the process of learning, or to help the child refine a sign to be closer to a standard, recognizable sign.

### **3.5. Repetition Method**

Repetition is one of the ways that is effective that is used among both learners with and without disabilities. Participants had collectively agreed that repetition method was a very crucial aspect needed to be used. This is because repetition improved retention, enhanced learning, increased confidence and brought about skill generations as well as consolidation of learning.

One participant was quick to say:

*"Arising from the primary teaching background I had, repetition was one of the instructional methods we were taught to use. The only difference is that this has to do with special needs children".*

On the other hand, much as repetition method was used, most participants indicated that they did not know how to use effectively to deafblind learners. The participants further elaborated that where the challenge was with among severe cases of deafblind learners.

All this was in line with Felicia (2024) who indicated that; repetition plays a crucial role in unlocking success for students with disabilities. It provides them with the opportunity to reinforce their learning, improve retention, build confidence, generalize skills, and consolidate their knowledge. By harnessing the power of repetition, educators and caregivers can help these students thrive academically and beyond.

### **3.6. One-On-One Method**

The participants had explained how the method was being used to learners with deafblindness. The participants had agreed that during lessons individual lesson plans were done tailored that considered the DB learner's specific learning style, interest and abilities. Clear explanations were set and be followed so that they could understand. Further, during a period to break tasks into smaller pieces, assignments were divided into smaller, manageable tasks. This approach helped students focus and prevents overwhelm and thereby

providing short time periods for each task can enhance concentration. In addition to that, space breaks between assignments were allowed for DB learners to refocus, recharge, and maintain attention during learning sessions.

Despite that method being used, teachers had indicated that they were not conversant with it and how to make it active.

One participant narrated that:

*"Much as one to one method is important, I just use it for the sake of doing it but in the actual sense I lack knowledge about it".*

Arising from those findings it was evident to indicate that teachers lacked knowledge on how to use one-on-one method. This was not in line with Davis (2015) who stated that; using one-on-one method was the practice of educating students in a way that accommodates their individual differences, disabilities, and special needs. This involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings. These interventions are designed to help individuals with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and in their community, which may not be available if the student were only given access to a typical classroom education.

### **3.7. Peer to Peer Methods**

The participants had unanimously agreed that peer to peer methods that not much was being used because it was difficult to integrate learners with DB and be helped by others. Peer tutoring is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy that involves students serving as academic tutors and tutees. Typically, a higher performing student is paired with a lower performing student to review critical academic or behavioral concepts. However, it has been a difficult exercise for participants to engage into it. Regardless of not using it much there were few notable benefits that were seen; it was a widely-researched practice across ages, grade levels, and subject areas, the intervention allowed students to receive one-to-one assistance, students had increased opportunities to respond in smaller groups, academic and social development was promoted for both the tutor and tutee, student engagement and time on task increased and peer tutoring increased self-confidence and self-efficacy. This was according to Spencer (2016).

Despite the school administrators trying to engage teachers to use peer tutoring, it had proved difficult for deafblind learners to grasp the whole concept, hence it was less used. This strategy was not supported by a strong research base of Vasquez and Slocum, (2015) who indicated that older student and younger student can have similar or differing skill levels, with the relationship being one of a cooperative or expert interaction. Tutors serve to model appropriate behavior, ask questions, and encourage better study habits, although, such arrangement also beneficial for students with disabilities as they served as tutors for younger students.

### **3.8. Curriculum Adaptations Put in Place for Learners with Deafblindness**

The participants were interviewed and arising from that, it was agreed that participants were not conversant in adapting the curriculum for deafblind learners. Initially it was established that the participants who were trained in special education had an understanding of how curriculum adaptations could be made for different disabilities such as intellectually impaired, visual and hearing impaired but could not categorically had knowledge of how deafblind learners' curriculum could be adapted. What was clearer from the findings were that despite teachers trained in special education they were not conversant with the concept of curriculum adaptation for deafblind learners. Although Adewumiet *et al.*, (2017) reported that teachers understood what curriculum adaptation is and what should be done, majority in this study showed that they did not understand the concept of adaptation for deafblind learners. However, few had demonstrated reasonable knowledge of adaptation although not the full expectations of the researcher. Further, contrary to what Mzizi (2014) found on curriculum adaptations for learners with learning impairments in the phase in Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State Province, this study found that many teachers did not understand the concept of curriculum adaptation. In addition to what was discovered, we can deduce that few teachers were able to apply some strategies of adapting the curriculum and not others. Occasionally, few were able to apply the simple strategy of giving extra time during lessons and assessments time, task analysis by breaking them into smaller components. The results were in agreement with the Zambia Education Curriculum (2015) who indicated that, teachers and teacher educators should be equipped with

knowledge and skills to enable them identify, screen and assess, thereafter providing appropriate interventions to learners with special educational needs. Further, respondents were also able to apply the strategy of giving different assessment tasks thereby reducing the number of tasks which also posed a challenge while replacing tasks.

The outcomes agree with Mzizi (2017) who also found teachers used the giving of extra time as prominent strategy. However, the results show that the majority of the respondents did use the specific tasks as a strategy consequently, similar outcomes according to Shey's (2017) in Cameroon, who found that teachers were able to apply some strategies except for reducing tasks when adapting the curriculum for learners with dyslexia. From the results and reviewed studies, teachers appear to avoid applying different strategies that involve reduction, omission or modifying the material. In addition to that; in the Zambian context, if the tasks are replaced or omitted, reduced or learners are given different tasks, the teaching for examination syndrome sways Learners with Special Education Needs and Disability (LSEND) to failing because the examination, which is centrally set, does not substitute, omit or replace examination tasks according to their abilities. In this regard, the MoGE (2016) has a progressive policy which says, "Examinations shall be based on modified or alternative curriculum for Learners with Special Education Needs and Disability (LSEND). In addition to that the Examination Council of Zambia-ECZ and school-based examinations for learners with hearing impairment shall be set in sign language". Although questions would arise as to how exams can be written in sign language, the idea of school-based exams demonstrate a will towards decentralized system. Despite such a policy being put in place, for deafblind learners education has not been clearly stated on what type of examinations should be written.

The researcher still feels that each modified curriculum should be specific to the needs of each learner. This simply means that a modified curriculum for deafblind learner should be different from a learner with autism. In the Zambian Education Curriculum Framework (2015) it is stated that, while striving for inclusive education provision, the intellectually impaired learners shall have an alternative education curriculum that respond to their needs. Arising from this statement the researcher can conclude that there has not been an emphasis on the adapted curriculum for deafblind learners.

### **3.9. The Available Teaching Resources for Learners with Deafblindness**

The participants were interviewed on the available teaching resources for learners with deafblindness. The respondents agreed that, teaching students with deaf-blindness required thoughtful strategies and accommodations to create effective and inclusive learning environments. However understanding deafblindness was a very important factor. Arising from these findings, the respondents during focus group discussions indicated that different teaching resources were applied during lessons. Firstly, the respondents were quick to mention that prior to delivery of the lesson; materials to suit the DB learners were to be set. That meant that, teachers looked at the severity of disability whether it is more on visual or hearing loss then capitalize on the remaining residual.

The respondents gave examples of charts, diagrams, auditory materials that would benefit the learner. However, some challenges were pointed out as lack of knowledge among teachers to provide the resources needed because most of them were not specifically trained to teach deafblind learners.

One respondent indicated that:

*"You know madam, the first time I came across this child, I was like dreaming because it was my first time. The question was, 'how will I communicate with this child?' 'First I experienced communication challenges'".*

This was important as ASDC News (2021) puts it that, as an educator, it was a responsibility to accommodate students with deafblindness in the classroom, by providing accessible materials (e.g., braille, large print), adjusting classroom layout for optimal communication and using assistive technology (e.g., screen readers, tactile graphics).

Arising from these findings, a researcher can deduce that a person with deaf-blindness experiences varying degrees of hearing and vision loss, which can impact their access to information. Communication methods differ among individuals with deaf-blindness. Some use tactile sign language, while others rely on American Sign Language (ASL) or other forms of communication. Therefore, interveners, trained professionals, may need to assist individuals with deaf-blindness in communication using tactile sign language. Conclusively the

teacher would need to be patient, respectful, and willing to find effective communication methods, Avoid distracting service animals accompanying visually impaired students. And if unsure, ask, "Can I help?" this was indicated by Clyne, *et al.*, (2015) the researcher further concluded that, teaching deafblind learners was a unique aspect and therefore, patience, respect, and a willingness to adapt were essential when teaching students with deaf-blindness and creating an inclusive environment, that can further support their unique learning needs.

### **3.10. The Benefits of Stakeholder (Parental) Collaboration on the Teaching of Learners with Deafblindness**

The participants interviewed agreed that some of the benefits of stakeholder's collaboration on education of deafblind learners were continuity of work between school and home. A high rate of rapport between parents and the teacher was also established during the study. From the focus group teachers indicated that, when both parents and teachers were involved, the learners' performance improved because even at home they were able to learn. The study was in line with Epstein (2021) who introduced the idea of parent-child interactive homework. Further, it was revealed that stakeholders such as parents were more connected to their deafblind learners because they were the ones with their children from birth. The study was consistent with Anyikwa and Obidike (2015) study which stressed that parental involvement provides support at home and school, which impacts on the educational performance of their children. Parent participation is important not only in school related activities, but also help their deafblind impaired children at home.

It was further revealed that when parents are involved in the education of their children, the learners are motivated and feel encouraged to perform better. Some parents had learnt basic skills in sign language which assisted them to help their children. The meaning of this finding is that, each time parents participated in the education of their children, the learners were performing well and this helped the teachers to provide more work to them. This also meant that parents and the teachers collaborated more and were able to find more other ways in enhancing deafblind education. The study was in line with Mbabazi (2019) who established that, parental involvement brings about a combination of commitment and active participation which produces measurable gains in learners' achievements. He further notes that, parental involvement meant knowing where a child's education journey was heading to and being part of the highs and lows along the way.

The study revealed that involvement of parents built a cordial relationship between school and families of children. It further revealed that there was a good link of bridging the gap between the school and the parents each time they were involved in the education of a DB learner. This was done by making sure the school was aware of the child's positives and negatives which aid the teacher to provide intervention measures. The study was in line with Christenson and Sheridan (2018) who showed that, families were equal partners in attaining educational goals for students because educators viewed families as initiators of family-school relationships that is essential for children's optimal academic, social, and emotional learning. The revealed study confirms with the theory of Epstein (2015) where learning at home was promoted. It was further noted that parental involvement in the learning of their children's education who are deafblind, enhanced academic achievement. This is because at home parent's help their children with homework and develop needed skills. Further, families showed interest to be involved in the decision making of policy management of the school and establishment of formal representation in school decision making processes.

### **3.11. Challenges Families Faced in the Education of Deafblind Learners in Special Schools**

Though this study on classroom teaching strategies for deafblind learners has shown benefits from both the school, the families, learners, and the community at large, families still find limitations hindering them from getting fully involved. From the study, it was difficult to involve some parents in the education of their DB children because of long distances where they came from. The school was failing to engage parents in different school programs because most of them were coming from distant places. The challenge of long distance made it difficult to have a complete multi-disciplinary team because parents lived in long far places and they were not attending the meeting when called upon. The findings are in line with Ndhlovu (2015) whose study revealed that parents living far from school need transport to make their involvement easier. The study did not reveal any engagements in the area of volunteering. Epstein (2015) theory shows that, families need to volunteer to contribute to their children's education in form of participating as audience members at school performances or sporting events. The study was also not in line with the theory in the area of community collaborations that relates to families' use of community resources and services to support their children's education. For example, families may visit the library or enroll their children in community programs to support learning and development. This was not revealed in the study.



Another challenge was that the teachers had a negative attitude towards deafblind education because of lack of training. Some of the teachers lacked training in handling deafblind learners. This made it difficult to involve the family at school level. The teachers also felt that they were given a tag because of teaching deafblind learners. Most teachers felt that they were labelled as teachers for the deafblind and if it happened that they were absent the other teachers were not ready to teach those learners. This contributed to them having a negative attitude towards the learners they handled. Concerns were also raised during the study that parents found it difficult working with educators that did not appreciate the effort they were making in supporting schools. It is therefore imperative that teachers treat parents with importance and build trust with parents to avoid suspicions standing in the way of sound parental involvement. Further, the teachers had limited knowledge to give to parents concerning their children education. This is because most teachers were not competent in deafblind education. To most teachers, it was seen to be a new area of teaching. Teachers were not trained to handle learners with deafblindness during their college training and hence handling these learners was by try and error method. From the above findings, the level of competence was not adequate for a significant number of the teachers and therefore this indicates a gap or need in the area of deafblind education in order to enhance the competence of the teachers. It is worthy to note that the needs of learners who are deafblind are different from those who are only blind or only deaf. Thus, basing on the gap identified, teachers of deafblind learners need to have special skills. This affirms the observation by Riggio (2019) who noted that a teacher of deafblind learners must be knowledgeable about deafblindness, must solicit guidance from a deafblind specialist, and must treat communication with the student who is deafblind as a primary need. A teacher who has this set of abilities is competent enough to work with deafblind learners. The study finding conforms to previous research, for instance, teachers must be able to assess, interpret, and respond to the pre-symbolic forms that a learner who is deafblind may communicate to increase their communication development, skills, and interaction.

The socio-economic status of parents was also a challenge to education of their deafblind children. It was further revealed that parents opted to send their children with no disabilities to main school rather than paying for their deafblind learners. Some parents of deafblind learners felt it was a share waste of money travelling to the school to check on the child's performance. Additionally, parents were not ready to provide education for their deafblind children on their own but an inclusion of the church, non-governmental originations and the government would be of great help. The findings were not in line with Ehlers-Flint, (2015) who revealed that, parents of deafblind learners have to face challenges such as low socioeconomic status. The study revealed that parents had less time to visit their deafblind child because they were busy with work. Further parents did not feel the need of visiting the school of their children because it was the responsibility of the school to take care of their deafblind children. The study was in line with Williams (2015) on parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education, who mentioned that, parents reported some barriers to parental involvement and some of this included lack of time especially for working and or single parents.

In addition to that, this finding was in line with Horvatin (2021) who states that working parents, those struggling to earn a living or those with one or more jobs do not have time to get involved in activities that promote strong relationships among parents and schools. Schools, therefore, need to address issues of parental involvement with much importance and make plans to convince parents to find time to get involved with school regardless of their busy schedules. Despite parents being able to help their children at home by reading, helping with homework the study showed that, parents had challenges with language communication which makes it hard to be involved in the education of their deafblind learner. In most cases during closing days, when parents come to pick their children, they call teachers to help them interpret what their children would be saying. The findings were consistence with Ndhlovu (2015) who mentioned that, teachers think that families are too overwhelmed to participate in their children's education and teachers often are not willing to accept families as equal partners. This makes parents to feel like they have nothing to contribute. He further notes that, the most prominent barriers in family involvement were negative attitudes towards the children by parents themselves and lack of skills to apply in their quest to help their children.

### **3.12. Measures to Improve Stakeholder's Involvement on Education of Deafblind Learners**

The study showed trainings needed to be provided, follow-ups made to parents especially during the holidays to see how the DB learner was benefiting from the few skills learnt. It was further revealed that, bringing health personnel, the psychiatric to assist learners was an important factor because DB combination appears to have more challenges than any other disabilities. The study further showed that there was need to create trainings for parents either with basic sign language or braille. The study is in line with Miles (2018) who indicates that specialists trained in deafblindness need to have a unique combination

of skills, knowledge, and experiences that address the combined impact that vision and hearing loss has on all areas of human development.

The study revealed that in making policy implementation there was need to come up with the multi-disciplinary team that would involve parents to deafblind children. Further the study showed that, local policies needed to be taken into seriously such as allowing parents to be participating in the education of their children. In addition to that the study revealed that policy implementation would be significant in helping parental involvement in special schools. The study also revealed that policy makers needed to assist teachers on how to teach deafblind learners because that in turn will assist schools to involve parents often. The study is in line with the Ministry of Education (2016) which formulated strategies to implement special education and one of them was to train an adequate number of teachers in special education. There was need to enhance parental participation in schools and provide a platform to increase awareness on deafblind education.

The study further revealed that there was need to increase the rate of interaction between parents and the school and to come up with programs involving the parents such as increase on days of open days so that parents can come and have enough time with the school and acquire few skills. The study showed that it would be important to train teachers in deafblind education and provide enough literature on deafblind education. There was also need to plan together with parents especially during meetings and strengthen multi-disciplinary team that could work hand in hand with the school. The study also showed suggestions that forming parental groupings at provincial level would help, providing literature to districts and schools would quicken the information to reach the parents. Few parents could be empowered with skills on deafblind education and later they can also train the other parents. The study also revealed that forming deafblind associations where parents would be discussing challenges, successes and other concerns for their deafblind children needed to be encouraged by the school.

In conclusion although on the contrary, Epstein' model (2015) portrays schools as open to more participation from varied stakeholders and suggests shared activities to ensure families feel welcomed at the school, the framework continues to position the school as the one that sets the agenda. This however regresses back to the idea of restricting the goals of the partnership to benefits for the children, rather than focusing on partnerships that are valuable for all involved parties, including family members and teachers. Nonetheless, Patte's (2021) explains that, Epstein's theory can be used to establish shared responsibilities of families, educators, and other community members and as a tool for policy changes that can lead to improved leadership and research in the area of family partnerships in schools.

In the researchers' opinion responding to the objectives set, curriculum for the deafblind were still predominantly sidelined and a response to that has not been focused based. The result simply showed that the curricula being applied in classes for the deafblind were different disabilities and basically did not even offer mathematics, life sciences, physical sciences, and economic management sciences etc., which could have a positive a bearing on participation in society especially for mild cases. In apparent situation the researcher deduced that certainly it is only a few deafblind learners who would make it to independent living. What seems to be compounding the problem was the fact that no one seems to know or understand that the deafblind are among other learners in those school, as a result there is no meaningful provision furnished for classes even from district and provincial offices. It is worth noting that, working with deafblind learners requires intensive one on one support but that means the teacher should have one or two classroom assistants. Supplementary it can be concluded that in southern Province of Zambia there is no capacity at present for meeting the needs of the deafblind widely. Few schools are able to provide education for deafblind learners where the same curriculum is offered with those who are not deafblind. This implies that barely just the surface has been scratched in servicing deafblind individuals.

It was further revealed that district support specialists were not conversant with curriculum matters for deafblind learners. In backing this view one respondent echoed the following sentiment:

*"When district education standard officers eventually come to our school, they offer advice on school administration, not various ways in which I could impart skills to my deafblind learners".*

However, the researcher of this article believes that with proper communication methods, a conducive learning/teaching environment and an accessible curriculum; deafblind learners can benefit and increase them educationally.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, responding to the objectives set, curriculum for the deafblind were still predominantly sidelined and a response to that has not been focused based. This is because the results simply showed that the curricula being applied in classes for the deafblind was the same with those having different disabilities. This in turn could have a positive bearing on participation of deafblind children in society especially for mild cases. In apparent situation the researcher deduced that certainly it is only a few deafblind learners who would make it to independent living.

#### **Declarations**

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