

Challenges Encountered By Sign Language Interpreters for Students with Hearing Impairment in Some Selected Inclusive Schools in Northeast Zone of Nigeria

Musa Garba Dagari

Abdullahi Yahaya Bamalli
ayahayabamaili@gmail.com
and

Abubakar Umar Ahmed
Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Science,
Kaduna Polytechnic,
Kaduna State, Nigeria
abubakarahmedumar78@gmail.com

Abstract

Sign language interpreters are the channel that can provide students with hearing impairment with an effective communication. This study is therefore aimed at investigating the challenges faced by sign language interpreters of students with hearing impairment in some selected inclusive school setting in Northeast zone of Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study. A cross sectional study design was used, and both the sign language interpreters and students with hearing impairment were purposively sampled. A 4-point Likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection, while the data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentages, means and standard deviation. The study revealed a shortage of sign language interpreters compared to students with hearing impairment enrolment. The study revealed that sign language interpreters always find it difficult to interpret within the deaf culture due to inadequate methodology, vocabulary and communication strategies to meet the learners' needs. The study revealed that sign language interpreters received meagre amount as their salary compared to other staff. The study therefore recommended employment of qualified sign language interpreters as well as organising trainings and workshops that would equip them with more advanced and adequate knowledge.

Keywords: *Communication strategies, Inclusive schools, Hearing impairment, Sign language interpreters, Student with hearing impairment*

Introduction

Sign language interpretation is a mechanism that bridges the communication gap between individuals who converse through the use of sign language and those who use spoken language. Similarly, a sign language interpreter is a trained professional who facilitates communication and conveys all auditory and signed information for both students with or without hearing impairment to fully interact. Thus, the job of the sign language interpreters is to provide services to ensure clear communication on behalf of the parties. An interpreter converts spoken words into sign language as well as translate sign language into an oral form. According to Ademokoya (2006), children with hearing impairment who are exposed to sign language interpreters in their various classes perform better academically than those who are not. Therefore, sign language interpretation is observed to positively impact learning and contributes significantly to academic achievement among students with hearing impairment. On the basis of the foregoing, the sign language interpretation training in Nigeria was a landmark in the education of children with hearing impairment. The introduction of sign language training in Nigeria was a landmark in the education of children with hearing impairment.

Kaduna Polytechnic and other tertiary institutions were mandated and aided to train professional teacher in special needs education, including sign language interpreters (NIEP, 1996). However, this development has not properly addressed equal education access to students with hearing impairment, which is contrary to the United Nations (1993) Standard Rule Six (6) on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities which states that nations should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary education opportunities for children, youth and adults within integrated/inclusive setting. The Salamanca statement and framework for action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994) also goes beyond integration and advocacy for inclusive education as a means for education for all (EFA). In this case, inclusive education means having a flexible educational system that fulfils meaningful education for all children, including those with hearing impairment. However, inclusive education may not be achieved easily if all the possible mechanisms are not practically put in place and if the government does not support the existing mechanism to achieve this goal. This background therefore gives a convinced platform to single out a case study on the challenges faced by sign language interpreters for students with hearing impairment in inclusive settings using selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria so as to determine possible solutions.

The reason behind carrying out this research study emerged from the fact that it was mandatory for all students with disabilities, including those with hearing impairment to gain access to meaningful education in the best way possible (FRN, 2013). To date, many people in Nigeria who work as sign language interpreters, either with educational institution or organisation have not had formal training in this field. Even with the services of a highly skilled sign language interpreter, it is believed that their full access to the content and the social life of the children with hearing impairment goes with challenges. Interpreting in a hearing classroom (inclusive setting) and in any other activities in such a setting could be challenging if interpreted by third parties. Against this background therefore, the study investigated the factors that deter successful interpretation services and possible means of

alleviating them in a complex inclusive education setting.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to find out the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters for students with hearing impairment in inclusive settings in some selected states of Northeast zone of Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

- i. find out the prevalence of skill/unskillful sign language interpreters in selected inclusive school in Northeast states zones of Nigeria;
- ii. find out prevalence of students with hearing impairment enrolled in selected inclusive school in Northeast states zones of Nigeria;
- iii. find out the categories of challenges faced by sign language interpreters in inclusive school setting in some selected states of Northeast zone of Nigeria; and
- iv. proffer possible solution to the challenges faced by both sign language interpreters and students with hearing impairment in inclusive school setting in some selected state of Northeast zone of Nigeria.

Methodology

Cross sectional survey design was used for the study. According to Mwase, Mwottok, Mzzadu and Zuhumben (2012), cross sectional survey requires that data are collected at a particular time, from a sample for the purpose of describing the population represented by the sample at a particular time. The design is deemed appropriate since data were collected from the element without imposing any condition or treatment on them (Ekeh, 2003). More importantly, the design allowed researcher to use the questionnaire to collect data since the main objective is to investigate the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters in inclusive school settings in some selected states of Northeast zone of Nigeria.

The researcher developed an instrument named “Challenges Faced by Sign Language Interpreters for Students with Hearing Impairment in Inclusive Schools of Selected States in Northeast zone of Nigeria (CFSLINZ) for the data collection. The instrument consists of two sections. Section A presented the demographic data of the respondents, while section B measured the challenges encountered by sign language, which is made up of five question items based on 4 Likert rating pattern of SA (4) to SD (1). The choice of the questionnaire was because it facilitates collection of data in a uniform manner from a large number of respondents spread over large area within a short period of time which can then be interpreted comparatively (Maiwada, 2009).

Results

This section presents the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire administered to the respondents.

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of skilled/unskilled sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of selected state in Northeast zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Means rating of prevalence number of skill/unskill sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of the selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria

Variable	Respondents	Skilled	Percentage	Unskilled	Percentage
Unity College , Bauchi	Male	1	11.11%	6	33.3%
	Female	1			
Kasugula Primary School , Nguru	Male	3	16.6%	-	-
	Female				
Federal Unity College , Buniyadi	Male	1	5.5%	3	16.6%
	Female				
Magumeri Primary School , Borno	Male	1	11.11%	1	5.5%
	Female	1			

Table 1 shows that 11.11% were skilled sign language interpreters while 33.3% were unskilled at Unity College Bauchi. Furthermore, Table 1 revealed that 16.6% were skilled while there were no unskilled sign language interpreters at Kasugula Primary School Nguru. Skilled sign language was 5.5%, while 16.6% were unskilled at Federal Unity College Buniyadi. Similarly, the table show that 11.11% were skilled while 5.5% were unskilled sign language interpreters at Magumeri Primary School, Borno State.

Research Question Two: What is the prevalence of students with hearing impairment enrolled in inclusive school of selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Means rating of prevalence of students with hearing impairment enrollment in inclusive schools of the selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria

Variable	Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Unity College, Bauchi	Male	53	32%
	Female	30	
Kasugula Primary School, Nguru	Male	61	40.7%
	Female	43	
Federal Unity College, Buniyadi	Male	24	16%
	Female	17	
Magumeri Primary School, Borno	Male	19	10.5%
	Female	8	
	Total	255	

Table 2 shows that there were 53 male and 30 female students with hearing impairment enrolled at Unity College, Bauchi with 32%. Kasugula Primary school with 61 male and 43 female enrolled with 40.7%. Federal Unity College Buniyadi with 24 male and 17 female enrolled with 16% while Magumeri primary school Maiduguri with 19 male and 8 female students with hearing impairment enrolled respectively.

Research Question Three: What are the categories of challenges faced by sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of the selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria?

Table 3: Means rating on the challenges faced by sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of the selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Efx	X	Remarks
1	Difficulty in interpreting cultural diversity.	70	24	8	7	375	3.4	Agreed
2	Inability to hear the speaker very well due to his accent or bad output from the electronic gadget.	60	31	10	8	361	3.3	Agreed
3	Educational level and understanding to meet the communication strategies and linguistic needs of the learners.	67	28	9	5	375	3.4	Agreed
4	Shortage of interpreters leading to interpretation for a long hour resulting in stress and burn out.	80	20	7	2	316	2.8	Agreed
5	Lack of motivational support by the authority concerned.	64	34	8	3	377	3.4	Agreed

The result in table 3 shows that item 1 with a mean score of 3.4 is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that one of the major challenges faced by sign language interpreters is difficulty in interpreting the deaf cultural diversity. However, item 2 with a mean score of 3.3 is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that inability to hear the speaker due to his accent/bad output of gadget, leading to the challenges of proper interpretation services to learners with hearing impairment in an inclusive school environment. Item 3 with a mean score of 3.4 which is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that education background of sign language interpreters to meet the communication and linguistic needs of learners is one of the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters. While the item 4 with a mean score of 2.8 which is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that shortage of sign language manpower to interpret for a long hour resulting in stress and burn out. Item 5 with a mean score of 3.4 which is greater than the cut-off point of 2.5 agreed that lack of motivational support from the authority concerned remains one of the key challenges facing the work of sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria.

Research Question Four: What are the possible solutions to the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of the selected states of Northeast zone of Nigeria?

Table 4: Means rating on the possible solutions to the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters in inclusive school of selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Efx	X	Remarks
6	Training/workshop for sign language interpreters in order to have deep root of deaf culture and be vast in many subjects/courses.	85	17	5	2	403	3.6	Agreed
7	Sign language interpreters should be given manuscripts/materials to go through before the classes/lectures begin.	90	15	4	-	413	3.7	Agreed
8	Employment of professional sign language interpreters with relevant qualifications and adequate vocabulary.	87	20	2	-	412	3.7	Agreed
9	Availability of sign language interpreters that can cover a long period of classes/lecture hours.	94	15	-	-	421	3.8	Agreed
10	Provision of financial/motivational support by the authority concerned.	70	30	7	2	316	2.8	Agreed

The result in table 4 above shows that item 6 with a mean score of 3.6 which is greater than cut-off point of 2.5 agreed that organising training/workshop of sign language interpreters in order to have more knowledge on deaf culture as well as to be very vast in other subjects could be a possible solution to the challenges faced by sign language interpreters. Item 7 with a mean score of 3.7 which is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that giving manuscripts or materials to the sign language interpreters to go through them before the classes/lectures begin could be a possible solution to the challenges encountered by sign language interpreters. Item 8 with a mean score of 3.7 which is greater than the cut-off points of 2.5 agreed that employment of professional sign language interpreters with relevant qualifications and adequate vocabularies in sign language interpretation services could be a possible solution to the challenges. Item 9 with a mean score of 3.8 which is greater than the cutoff point of 2.5 agreed that availability of sign language interpreters to cover other classes or lectures could be a possible solution to the challenges. While item 10 with a mean score of 2.8 is greater than the cut-off point of 2.5 agreed that provision of financial and motivational support by the authority concerned could also boost the morale of interpreters toward attaining their interpretation duty very well.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question One: The findings revealed that there were one (1) skilled male and one (1) skilled female sign language interpreters, as well as six (6) unskilled sign language interpreters at Unity College, Bauchi. At Kasugula Primary School, there were three (3) skilled sign language interpreters. Furthermore, there were one (1) skilled male and three (3) unskilled sign language interpreters at Federal Unity College, Buniyadi, while there were one (1) male and one (1) female skilled sign language interpreters as well as one (1) male unskilled sign language interpreter at Magumeri Primary School, Maiduguri.

Research Question Two: The findings revealed that there were fifty-three (53) male and thirty (30) female students with hearing impairment at Unity College Bauchi, while in Kasugula, there were sixty-one (61) male and forty-three (43) female students. Furthermore, at Federal Unity College, Buniyadi there were twenty-four (24) male and seventeen (17) female students, while at Magumeri the student enrollment ratio were nineteen (19) male and eight (8) female students with hearing impairment.

Research Question Three: Findings of this study were about the categories of challenges faced by sign language interpreters in an inclusive school of selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria. The responses to this question are contained in table 3; items 1,2,3,4 and 5. The items have a mean score of 3.4, 3.3, 3.4, 2.8 and 3.4 respectively above the criterion mean score of 2.5. The findings showed that the sign language interpreters were facing difficulties in interpretation of deaf cultural diversity. The findings also revealed that there was shortage of sign language interpreters leading to long period of time for interpretation, inability to hear the speaker due to their accent or bad output of the gadget, lack of educational qualification in the field of sign language interpretation, as well as lack of motivational support by the authority concerned were part of the categories of challenges facing sign language interpreters in inclusive schools of selected states in Northeast zone of Nigeria.

Research Question Four: The findings of the study revealed that possible solutions to the above mentioned challenges faced by sign language interpreters include organising workshop for sign language interpreters in order to have more sign language interpretation skills about deaf culture, availability and employment of qualified interpreters and provision of manuscript before the classes/lecture begin, as well as provision of adequate welfare or salary package in order to motivate them and boost their morale.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, there is shortage of qualified and competent sign language interpreters to cater for the needs of students with hearing impairment to meet the communication and linguistic needs to interpret the deaf cultural diversity. Furthermore, it is important for the lecturers/teachers to utilise the services of interpreters effectively. Effective use of interpreting services requires an accurate understanding of their roles.

Unfortunately, the sign language interpreters in inclusive settings are faced with numerous challenges ranging from unclear instruction from the speaker, lack of adequate vocabulary, rapid rate of delivering lectures during classes, and the sign language interpreters do have the privilege of going through the manuscripts before the classes begin as well as the problem of inadequate financial support.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Training and workshop should be organised to produce interpreters who are proficient with a high level of skills in order to ensure that interpretation service delivery is qualitative towards ensuring high academic performance among students with hearing impairment.
2. Employment of qualified and competent sign language interpreters that can cover a long period of lecturing hours with adequate vocabulary to meet the learners' needs should be put into consideration by the government.
3. Review and provision of adequate welfare or salary packages for interpreters, which could boost their morale should be a top priority of the government.
4. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that sign language interpreters acquire certification and adequate qualification before being permitted to work in a classroom. This is because sign language interpreters are considered a gateway for the active academic performance of students with hearing impairment especially in inclusive system of education.
5. Sign language interpreters working in an inclusive setting and other levels of education should be provided with regular sensitization and on the job trainings.
6. Sign language interpreters should be vast in interacting with other subjects or courses so that they would be able to pass the expected information to students with hearing impairment.

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