

# Review of Challenges of Hearing Impaired Students in Integrated Class in Public Schools in Ethiopia: A Review Article

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## Abstract

Integration of students with hearing impaired students come as an education policy in Ethiopia so that long tends of exclusion of deaf students from school get solved. Important logic behind integration was not only academic benefit but also development of social relation of students with hearing impaired and social isolation get blocked. However, scholars have no common argument regarding joining both hearing and hearing impaired students together in one class. Accordingly, based on this review of the recent literatures, social benefit is weighing more than academic benefit for hearing impaired students in integrated class. Absence of resources centers in almost all public schools, lack off sign language skill among all classroom teachers, awareness gap among staff and teachers and less collaboration and commitment among stakeholders to implement integration policy considered as a key challenges for hearing impaired students not to benefit from the integration policy.

**Keywords:** Hearing impaired, integrated, Public

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Since 1948 the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, there have been legislations on providing education for all children and all countries in the world are working towards it. Basically, education is informative in serving to a long lasting effect on the person's mind and ability. Also it is a powerful instrument of social change and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. Again, education is basic necessity for all people which is recognized as a primary means for gaining independence, citizenship rights, appropriate employment, economic power and self-empowerment (*UNICEF, 2007*).

However, this right of education is not being entertained by higher number of people because different reasons among different society in the world. From many other factors, disability is one of constraints which holding back many people from education in collaboration with culture and religion misunderstanding and policy target gaps. It was estimated 10% of the world's children have physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health impairment. Almost 80% of these children with disability live in developing countries (Shiv, K., 2006). In Ethiopia, according to the 2007 Population and Housing Census, there were 805,492 people with disabilities, out of which 27,288 were deaf and 37,632 were hard of hearing. Most of these people are children and young (Central Statistical Agency, 2010; Sintayehu, 2015).

In general, disability is can be seen in two major types: physical and sensory disability. Accordingly, hearing impairment, the key concern of this study, is one of the sensory impairments which is well recognized all over the world. Conceptually, hearing impairment is the partial or total loss of the ability to hear in one or both ears caused by damage to or malformation of one or more parts of the ear (Rafi, 2008).

This hearing impairment is well recognized all over the world in general and particularly in Ethiopia as main factor being considered as big factor for many children not to access education (Central Statistical Agency, 2010). The enrolment rate and literacy achievement of deaf children is far below the average for the population at large. Illiteracy and semi-literacy are serious problems among Deaf people. Without appropriate education, advancement in society as an independent, employed, contributing citizen becoming problematic. Now a day, in absence of strong educational and language base, it is difficult to succeed in today's communities and marketplaces and in the world of technology and information (World Federation for the Deaf (WFD), 2010).

According to Ethiopia Ministry of Education (MoE) (2012) report, education has been inaccessible for most children with disabilities. For instance, the national average gross enrollment rate at primary level was 96.4% in 2010/11, while that of children with disabilities was merely around 3.2%. This signifies that nearly 96.8% of children with disabilities are not being served by the education system and are still out of school. Not only the access, but also the quality of education received by children with disabilities remained to be very low. This is mainly attributed to the inadequate training of teachers in special needs education, unfavorable school facilities and other issues. Student with hearing impairment (SwHI) are the main groups which suffered from less access to education.

To take action on this problem and make education accessible to all, Ethiopia government issued Integrated Education Policy in 2006. Accordingly, the issues of SwHI gradually become more prominent within

the various national policies and legislations (Gezahegne and Yinebeb, 2010). Integration from its very beginning, as policy direction to give education to all, requires the recognition of all children as full members of society and the respect of all of their rights, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, language, poverty or impairment. Integration involves the removal of barriers that might prevent enjoyment of these rights, and requires the creation of appropriate supportive and protective environments.

In integrated classroom, it was considered that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. The focus was on making education accessible for students with all kinds of disabilities, including SwHI (Sentayehu, 2015). This integration as a government reform strategy intended to include students with different kind of disabilities in mainstream regular schools. To successfully implement it, school curriculum, teaching methods, organization and resources need to be adapted to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their ability, can successfully participate in the regular classrooms (Asrat, 2013).

Even though integration is a policy concern for children with special needs, there are still a lot of challenges in its implementation and the satisfaction of hearing impaired students is under question. SwHI have challenges in integrated classroom even though there are improvements in some cases (Susanne *et al.*, 2008). Also, like other disabled students, hearing impaired students are not in a way to be competent with other hearing students and academic success is not equivalent to others. School curriculum, teaching methods, organization and resources related issues are not arranged in a way that it was supposed for integrated classroom. Hence, this review work is intended to go through the academic challenges of hearing impaired students in integrated classroom set up.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Concept of Hearing Impairment

According to WHO (2012), a person who is not able to hear as well as someone with normal hearing – hearing thresholds of 25dB (decibels) or better in both ears – is said to have hearing loss. Hearing impairment is the most frequent sensory deficit in human populations, affecting many people in the world, with consequences that include inability to interpret speech sounds, often producing a reduced ability to communicate, delay in language acquisition, economic and educational disadvantage, social isolation and stigmatization (Colin, 2003).

Hearing impairment as a general term continuum of hearing loss from mild to profound, which includes the sub classification of the hard of hearing and deaf? Hard of hearing describe person with enough residual hearing, to use hearing (usually with hearing aid) as a primary modality for acquisition of language and in communication of others (Rafi, 2008; Mahwish, K., 2012). Whether it is permanently or fluctuating it ranges between 21 and 69Db (decibels). This condition can adversely affect the child's educational performance. Deaf described persons whose sense of hearing is nonfunctional for ordinary use in communication with or without a hearing aid. The loss is usually above 70Db. It is so severe that the person is impaired in processing linguistic information which adversely affects the educational performance (Susanne *et al.*, 2008, Batten *et al.*, 2013).

There are 360 million persons in the world with disabling hearing loss (5.3% of the world's population). Among these, 328 million (91%) of these are adults (183 million males, 145 million females) and the rest 32 (9%) million of these are children. The prevalence of disabling hearing loss in children is greatest in South Asia, Asia Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa (WHO, (2012) . The prevalence of disabling hearing loss in adults over 65 years is highest in South Asia, Asia Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately one-third of persons over 65 years are affected by disabling hearing loss (Mahwish, K., 2012).

### 2.2. Concept of Integration Education

Educational integration means that the disabled and non-disabled children and students are studying together, which enables them to get to know each other, to be together in one room during the classes and the leisure time activities in order to become familiar with each other. Inclusive/integration education refers to an education system that is open to all learners, regardless of poverty, gender, ethnic background, language, disabilities and impairments. Integration emphasizes that all children and students can learn (Rafi, 2008). It requires identifying barriers that hinder learning, and reducing or removing these barriers in schools, vocational training, higher education, teacher education, and education management. Its key Emphasis was on universalizing access and promoting equity for disadvantaged groups with special attention on removing educational disparities.

Integration has both advantages and disadvantages in its implementations. From the advantage side, it has support of social learning and social involvement in hearing society, it also elimination of minorities segregation, The children become more tolerant to each other, when they are learning together. This in turn helps to shape their future life in the society (Batten *et al.*, 2013). From disadvantages, its setting requires special service (integration into non-special schools and classes) is much more expensive because of special equipment, teachers who have the knowledge of sing language should be hired for translation purpose, the other problem is lack of social preparation and information about the handicapped of the teachers and children and children with

hearing impairment and their families have additional requirements to implement educational integration successfully (ibid).

### **2.3. Special Education in Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, modern education for disabled persons was started in by voluntary and religious missionary organizations around 1944 at the time the first school for the blind was established in western Ethiopia, Dambidolloo (Dagne, 2001). At that time, these educational services offered to visually impaired, hearing-impaired and mentally retarded children of the country. Scholars in a country agree that the trend of development of education of the disabled in general and the hearing-impaired in particular is similar to that of other developing countries. Missionaries established almost all of the special schools for hearing-impaired children in Ethiopia (Ababa, 1996).

Later, because of introduction of Education and Training Policy of the country, recognition is given to children who deserve special attention to their education due to their various disabilities. This policy encourages the establishment of more schools and enrollment of disabled children particularly hearing impaired ones. Currently there are many schools which are offering education for students that are entitled to get special need education comparing to the late governments with education policy that does not include disabled children at all (Kokkola 1997).

### **2.4. Legal frameworks for Right for Education in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian government Educational policies give more attention for students with disability. Ethiopian Constitution establishes the universal right to education, and emphasizes the need to allocate resources and provide assistance to disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, Article 41 and 91 in the constitution sets out the state's responsibility for the provision of necessary rehabilitation and support services for people with disabilities (FDRE, 1994). In addition, Ethiopia government has also ratified various international Conventions and instruments of relevance to inclusive education (MoE, 2012).

Education and Training Policy (1994), has given emphasis on the provision of education both to the handicapped and to the gifted in accordance with their potential and needs and further confirming that special education and training will be provided for people with special needs. In this policy framework, expansion of quality primary education to all citizens is set as not only a right but also a guarantee for development. It also aims at providing education to all children without any discrimination and assures that disadvantaged groups will receive special support in education.

Even though efforts are made to formulate new educational policy that allows equal access to all citizens, the number of special needs students that benefit from special education is very scarce. The negative attitude of the society towards disability, at least in part appears to be one of the reasons for the least enrolment of special needs students in schools (MoE, 2006). In fact, to materialize integration as an effective educational practice in the Ethiopian context, teachers and students should develop positive attitudes towards the integration of students with hearing impairment into regular classrooms.

In response to currently existing problems, still it was aimed in providing education to all children without any discrimination and assuring that disadvantaged groups will receive special support in education. Hence, recently, both Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I and II) of the country also give high attention to support the development of a country through accessing education to all groups of the people as a citizen of a country (FDRE, 2010). Education is in itself not a place or a goal, but a continuous, life-long process enabling one to acquire multiple skills needed to become an independent, educated, employed, self-actualizing, participating and contributing citizen of one's community and society.

### **2.5. Impact of Hearing Impairment on Academic Achievement**

Children with hearing loss have difficulty with all areas of academic achievement, especially reading and mathematical concepts. The gap in academic achievement between children with normal hearing and those with hearing loss usually widens as they progress through school. The level of achievement is related to parental involvement and the quantity, quality, and timing of the support services children receive (John and Sylod, 2013). Deaf children's significantly delayed language development, in sign or speech, leads to poor reading achievement; on average it is lower than literate levels. However, many deaf children read as well as their normally hearing peers; successful reading achievement can be based on either successful spoken language development or successful sign language development. Deaf children's incomplete language development also delays their ability to understand the motivations and actions of other people (Carrington and Robinson, 2006).

In addition, children who are born deaf frequently experience severely delayed and impoverished language development regardless of mode of expression, that is, spoken language or sign language. The delayed and depressed language development of deaf children, as a group, is not caused by, and does not cause, general intellectual deficiencies in cognitive domains that function independent of language (Flem *et al*, 2004). In

general, hearing loss affects social experiences, which threatens deaf early adolescents' well-being in school along with their academic progress.

## 2.6. Challenges of Hearing Impaired Students in Integrated Classroom

Hearing impaired students face so many challenges encountered in academic path. In our existing social context, children with even minimal hearing loss are at risk academically compared to their normal hearing peers. Untreated, reduced hearing can lead to social, emotional and learning difficulties for the child in the long term (Carrington and Robinson, 2006; Asrat, 2013). Obviously, in all integrated schools in average, children with hearing difficulties had a lower grade point average than their school mates. The pupils with hearing problems were found to have lower average grades than children with normal hearing (Hear-it, 2012)

In Ethiopia context, many factors continue affecting and regulating the development of integration strategy in a country. A limited understanding of the concept disability, negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change are the major barrier impeding inclusive education. This piece explores the significance of attitudes, factors that might be affect teachers attitudes, teachers' role and training in an inclusive setting and challenges of inclusive education. Hence, teachers' attitude toward inclusion and hearing impaired students is a key problem for implementation of the program (Asrat, 2013).

In addition, teachers training programmes, adapted curriculum, teachers' attitudes, materials and equipment provision and financial sources are among the frontiers of challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. As way forward, the shift of thinking from an unnatural segregated setting toward inclusive education must be given the due attention it deserves if inclusive education is to be favored and practiced as educational modality (Gezahegn, 2013).

Another major problem encountered by the students with hearing impairment is Ethiopian sign language. Now being integrated with hearing students, the study is becoming difficult because the teachers lack knowledge of Ethiopian sign language (Gezahegne and Yinebeb, 2010). Sometimes some teachers speak orally and are unable to meet impaired students' needs. They cannot provide us any kind of support except for hearing students. Due to the absence of communication with other hearing peers in the school, they sometimes get quarreled with hearing peers. Even if students with hearing impairment want to play with them they do not understand their interest.

Many children fail to communicate that they cannot hear what the teacher or the other pupils are saying. They may never ask the other pupils to repeat themselves. It is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century (Tirussew, 2005). Deaf people have missed many opportunities due to the fact that they were being left out because of the gap that language barriers created. Vocational training for the deaf has been created as a means of teaching those skills that will enable them to become self-sufficient (Gezahegn, 2013).

Lack of resources center is another challenge for hearing impaired students. Resource center is a pedagogical center which is equipped with specific materials and assistive devices as well as staffed with professionals to give support to special needs education learners, teachers and neighboring schools (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). However, arrangement of his resources is not implemented and impaired students get less support.

Less motivation among teachers who teach hearing impaired also becoming a great challenge. Many teachers did not show interest to update their teaching method to use flexible curriculum in order to ease the learning of students with hearing impairment. Teachers are not willing to attend the training for they think that it is a burden in addition to their daily task. They are not motivated because they are not paid (Gezahegn, 2013).

## 3. Conclusion

Integrated /inclusive education is being seen as basic human right and countries all over the world are implementing it even though there is variation because of policy differences. Ethiopia also adopted and designed its own policy which encourages access to education for all children in the country with special treatment to disability.

However, family background, school arrangements, communication barriers, teachers' attitude towards integration, support for hearing impaired students and related factors are hindering impaired students academic performance in all level of education.

## 4. Ideas forward

- ❖ Awareness creation has to be given by school principals to all students and teachers regarding integration of disables students in general and hearing impaired students specifically.
- ❖ As much as possible, resources which could support hearing impaired students have to be facilitated.
- ❖ On-job training has to be facilitated for teachers so that communication barriers solved



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