

Placement Option Influence on Education Participation for Learners with Hearing Impairments in Special Public Primary Schools in Meru and Isiolo Counties- Kenya

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Abstract

Globally need for education, as a measure of one's ability to function fully in today's society, is an important motivator for efforts to achieve the highest level of education in the world. The persistence underachieving of deaf students in Kenyan schools is of great concern as evidenced by final average scores in their formative and summative scores in their assessments. This study aimed to find out how placement options influence education participation for learners with hearing impairment. The study was guided by Maslows theory of motivation in learning. A phenomenological research design was utilized. The study targeted three primary schools handling learners with hearing impairments in Meru and Isiolo counties that is Kaaga, Njia, and Isiolo school for learners with hearing impairment. A thematic approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. The study revealed that the assessment of learners for placement was not effectively done. The following were some recommendations made. Parents should be made aware of the existence of EARC and its role. Learners should be assessed early enough to avoid the placement of overage learners in lower grades. The EARC should be staffed with the right and adequate personnel for effective assessment. The government should fund EARC so that the staff can effectively carry its role of sensitization and mobilization in a wide area thus helping in early identification, assessment, and placement.

Keywords: *Placement option, education participation, learners with hearing impairments*

1.0 Introduction

Globally, there has been a great focus on deaf students' educational participation ever since the United Nations declared in 1948 that education is a fundamental right for all people. According to WHO predictions from 2020, there are 250 million people with hearing loss globally. Less than 1% of children who are deaf have some kind of access to education. As a linguistic and cultural minority, hearing-impaired students mostly communicate through signs or images, and they need qualified and experienced specialists to help them do so. Every kid has the right to go to school, as stated in the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the kid. As said by Elizabeth (2020). This is a universal reality that applies to the young deaf people. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressly forbids denying students with hearing

impairments the opportunity to participate in the educational system on the grounds of their disability and emphasizes the importance of respecting this right (WHO, 2021).

In this study, students that have hearing loss are referred to be deaf (Knoor, 2019). After the American and French revolutions in the late 1700s, successful teaching strategies for deaf children were created (Livingston, 2019). The majority of societies merely provided protection to deaf pupils. However, sentiments shifted as concepts of democracy and individual freedom swept through France and America. Leaders in the domains of education and medicine, as well as political reformers, started speaking out in favor of deaf children, claiming that they ought to be given the skills necessary to become self-sufficient and contributing members of society. This humane quality transcends the need to shield and support students who are deaf (National Association for the Deaf, 2020).

Graham (2019) noted, there was a downturn in this advocacy, which was ascribed to the following reasons. disagreements between experts and the public's unwillingness to pay fees, particularly in recessionary and inflationary times. These elements made it more difficult for students with hearing impairments to participate in early schooling. Special education for the deaf did not start to reverse the nearly century-long dynamic of neglect and decline until after World War II (Beaver, 2021).

1.1 Problem Statement

The government of Kenya has made strides in promoting equity in ensuring equal participation of learners in education including learners with hearing impairment. Various legal frameworks and policies to support education for learners with hearing impairments have been put in place. Such policies in place include the Disability Act of 2008, The Integrated Quality Act of 1999, and the Special National Needs Educational Policy of 2010 (MOE, 2010) Through the Ministry of education, teachers have been trained in the universities and colleges like Kenya Institute of Special Education. The government has also included the capitation for learners with hearing impairment in the budgetary allocation with Ksh 2500 for each learner which is higher compared with the allocation for hearing learners. Teachers handling learners with hearing impairments receive an additional Ksh 10000 per month above the salary of a teacher handling hearing learners' all these initiatives are aimed at promoting education participation for learners with hearing impairment so that they can reap equal benefits with their hearing counterparts out of education.

However, despite the mentioned effort, the education participation for a learner with hearing impairment has been dismal as indicated by academic performance through both summative and formative assessments where they rank last with the mean score ranging between 100-150 marks (Ministry of Education 2014) Report from the ministry of education 2009 attributed this to the inadequacy of assessment where they rank the last with the mean score ranging between 100-150 marks (Ministry of Education 2014) Report from the ministry of education 2009 attributed this to inadequacy of assessment where they rank the last with the mean score ranging between 100-150 marks (ministry of Education 2014). Report from the ministry of education 2009 attributed this to inadequacy of trained teachers, communication barriers and inadequate knowledge on how to handle learners with hearing impairment. The gap exists in that there could be other factor that could be influencing education participation for learners with hearing impairment. This study sought to investigate placement option influence on education participation of learners with hearing impairments in special public primary schools in Meru and Isiolo counties.

1.2 Research Objective

To find out how placement options influence education participation for learners with hearing impairments.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was grounded in Maslow's theory of learning motivation. It is a popular motivational theory that is widely referred to in educational circles. For effective educational participation of learners with hearing impairment Maslow suggests that the needs of learners need to be met which are in hierarchical order. It is usually through the active involvement of the head teacher that these needs are availed to learners. As stated by Mathew & Lopez (2020), the most crucial educational objective, according to Maslow's theory, is for students with hearing impairment to learn and participate fully in learning.

2.2 Empirical Review

Educational placement for learners with hearing impairment is putting a learner with hearing impairment in the most appropriate educational setting or position (Sambu 2019). Learners with hearing impairment can receive their education in several settings which include special schools, special classes in a regular school, and an inclusive setting.

In America, as put across by the National Centre for Education Statistics (2015) learners are placed in various learning options in accordance with IDEA regulations where a learner enters the special education system after parents or a teacher requests an education evaluation based on assessment results. A team of professionals including the school psychologist determines whether the learner has a qualifying disability (Stephanie, 2019).

Special schools in China are fewer in number and usually farther from public schools, and parents often know very little about them. Governments often require that children be removed from their families and communities and placed in orphanages at an early age. In addition, many students with severe hearing loss are even expelled from special schools (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The findings by Human Rights Watch ought to recommend a way forward to alleviate the suffering of learners with hearing impairments.

According to a study done in Africa by Seaver (2018) placement of students with hearing impairments in Nigeria was done either in special units or schools, taking into account their academic level, communication style, and degree of hearing loss. This means placement decisions in Nigeria is not determined because of learner ability and needs but by the availability of special education and related services, availability of space, or parental prevailing situations and convenience. The placement of learners based on the above factors does not put the education needs of a learner into consideration (Sahlen, 2019). Wrongly placed learner may not receive the required assistive devices and other specialized resources needed for education participation in their school. Such learners may remain idle throughout the day lacking attention and assistance necessary for stimulation in learning (Smith, 2020). This study established that in Meru and Isiolo, there was not much consideration that was made while placing learners since the choices were few as the two counties have only three special schools catering to learners with hearing deficits.

According to MOE (2018), Kenya as a country has established 345 disability assessment centers to offer assessment services. These services are considered community based. However, the number of children screened for entry into educational programs is still small compared to those whose parents take advantage of this opportunity (MOEST, 2018). This study found that

many parents were not aware of the existence of assessment services and a majority of them took their children to school for learners with hearing impairment without referral from the assessment centers.

In the mid-1970s, Kenya joined the global trend of shifting to integrated education. Several deaf students have been placed in hearing schools and efforts have been made to accommodate their needs. Deaf students cannot participate effectively in learning in such settings because they are unprepared, resources are scarce, staff is not trained enough, and it is difficult for deaf students to follow the same curriculum as their hearing counterparts (MOEST, 2018). As noted by Woofson (2019), in determining and preparing the most appropriate placement options for each deaf learner, decisions need to be made about what services are needed, where the services will be provided, that is, whether it is a special unit, special school or acting in an inclusive environment.

The professionals to be engaged in service provision should also be identified. The primary mode of communication should also be established. Necessary adaptations should also be made (Emmy, 2020; Sahlen, 2019). The UK, which has incorporated integration into its educational policy since 1981 and where the majority of the pioneers of special education in Kenya received their training, is one Western country where trends and changes in the education system are closely tied to those in Kenya.

Pioneers who are educated in special education encourage a policy of integration in the education system. This has led to the adoption of instructional documents for the integration of deaf learners into public schools (William, 2018). In some public schools, special units were formed whose students were taught by several subject teachers who carried out normalization-oriented education.

3.0 Methodology

The study was guided by Maslow's theory of motivation in learning. Phenomenological research design was utilized. The study targeted three primary schools handling learners with hearing impairments in Meru and Isiolo counties that is Kaaga, Njia, and Isiolo school for learners with hearing impairment. The target population comprised 3 headteachers, 45 teachers, 254 parents, 254 learners, and 6 house parents. The sample size comprised 3 headteachers, 3 parents, 3 teachers, 6 learners and 9 support staff. The head teachers, teachers parents, and support staff were purposefully sampled while simple random sampling was utilized in sampling learners. Data collection tools utilized were open-ended questionnaires for head teachers, interview schedules for learners, parents, and class teachers document analysis, observation, and focus group discussion. A thematic approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. The presentation of the data was through description.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Results on the placement option management influence on education participation for learners with hearing impairments

The third objective of the study was to find out how placement option influences education participation for learners with hearing impairments in Meru and Isiolo counties. The researcher was of the feeling that those who could have been assessed and placed wrongly or placed late in school could be negatively affected in education matters. The responses to this question were elicited from the headteachers, teachers, parents, and pupils. The headteachers' questionnaire had five items to respond to and their responses were analyzed and integrated into the responses obtained from interview questions from parents, teachers, and pupils.

The first question from this topic inquired from the headteacher on the criteria that were used in admitting the learners to the institution.

The three headteachers had common responses. Some learners were referred to the institution through the sub-county CSO SNE, others were brought by their parents on the basis of being referred by a teacher from a regular school who has been handling the learner, referral from hospital facilities while others were brought directly from home and others through advice from a former parent.

The teachers interviewed had the following to say about the criteria for admitting learners to the institution.

Teacher A; *Some learners are assessed at the county level by CSO sne while others are referred to the institution by church organizations that are aware of the existence of the facility. Other learners are brought by community social workers. We had a case of a girl who had done KCPE and was later readmitted to our school to start afresh in a school for learners with hearing impairments. To me, I count it as a loss because the chances of this girl taking more than eight years to sit for the exam for learners with hearing impairment are not easy. How I wish such a child was identified early enough and the right placement was done. She could now be completing her secondary school level of education.* Teacher B; *Learners join this school through a referral by a former parent who is a friend of the parent affected. In my class, I have around three learners who were brought by old parents from their school. This means many are not aware of the existence of the school and EARC centers which play the role of assessment and placement.* Teacher C; *Some learners are brought to this school directly from home. This is after the parent has gone through a period of denial. Some are aged for the class. We have once received a pupil who was twelve years old and the child had never been to any school. Further inquiring from the parent, the parent said she had kept the child at home with the hope that one time the deafness would diminish and then the child would join the regular neighboring school.*

The parents had the following to say on the same point.

Parent A; *I took my child first in the regular school and as time went on the teachers advised me to visit EARC for assessment since the child appeared to be unresponsive to auditory cues. The EARC officer referred me to this school. I feel it was too late. But I had no knowledge of any school where my child would get his education. Most of we parents are not aware of the existence of assessment centers neither are we familiar with the existence of a school for learners with hearing impairment. A certain parent informed of how she inquired about the special school and she was misled that some that exist are day schools and the parents were discouraged because she felt that distance barrier would not allow her to be picking her child every morning and evening only to realize later that this was not true.* Parent B; *I had taken my child to a private for several years but I was advised later advised to take the child to a special school for learners with hearing impairments where her auditory needs could be addressed. I started looking for such a school and I was directed here. My child was in that school for many years but could not read and write. I think private school teachers should also be knowledgeable in matters of special needs so that prompt referral can be made faster so that the child can start his/her education in the right placement early enough.* Parent C; *My child was in a special unit in the neighboring schools. I knew of a special school that deals with hearing-impaired learners but due to financial issues, I could not immediately bring the child here. I feared the cost of buying school uniforms and other boarding facilities. I have also*

heard from other parents that they also feared the same and that distance discouraged them. They claim that only the rich who should take their children to boarding school early.

The pupils through interview also brought forth their sentiments on the same topic.

PUPIL A; ME STAY SCHOOL HOME NEAR YEAR MANY MANY// FRIENDS MINE COMMUNICATION NO//PUPIL B; ME HOME STAY YEAR MANY MANY//PUPIL C; MINE BROTHER MUM, SISTER SEE NO//SCHOOL HOME NEAR ME LOVE//PUPIL D; ME YEAR MANY MANY//SHY FEEL// PUPIL E; PARENTS MINE FAR FAR//LOVE NO//

From the above responses, the headteachers reported that some learners were assessed from EARC, others were brought by a parent through referral by a friend or by a regular teacher, and others were placed directly from home. From the teachers' responses, learners were referred to the school by some social organizations who were aware of the existence of the school. Parents had their children with hearing impairments held up in private school for long only to realize they could read and communicate therefore was referred to a special school. Some pupils reported that they had spent long in the regular school before placement. The documented perused on the placement of learners from EARC indicated that most of the learners had earlier on attended a regular school from their neighborhood' A focus member in the group also supported this statement through her sentiment that; *We had received children who were a bit elderly after inquiry on where they have been, the parents told us that they were in other schools.*

From the above narratives, it is true to suggest that learner with hearing impairments have gone through other institutions before placement in their current school where their needs are taken care of especially in the use of sign language which is their mode of communication. Mauro (2020) indicated that schools handling learners with hearing impairments provided some level of consistency during the study cycle of a learner. Ademokaya (2018) in his study in Nigeria found that students with hearing impairments were placed in special schools where they would have their education needs met. On the procedure of placement, the study carried out in Kajiado County by Hellen (2018) revealed that parents sought admission directly to school while others were referred by EARC. Direct admission of students with hearing impairments by parents in the schools of learners with hearing impairments is not procedural as the multidisciplinary team should be engaged in concluding where learners should be placed. Rosey (2019) was in support of the placement of learners through professional agreement.

The placement should be professionally based so that correct judgment can be made. The current study revealed a case where a learner was placed as hearing impaired in a school and later exhibited hearing. The learner was later rerouted back for better placement in regular school since the learner could not cope with the hearing-impaired learners. Due to inadequacy in placement procedures, some learners have been reported to have spent eight years in a regular school where they had also sat for KCPE and later re-admitted to schools for students with impairments. In such a case the learner has overstayed in the basic system of learning more than normal. Such also feel embarrassed when they get re-admitted to a special school this lowers their self-esteem. Chances are that even in their new school they poorly participate in education matters. Placement of a learner who is overage in a school reduces the confidence in a learner especially when they are placed in a class far below their age and where learners in the class are too young. Such learners also suffer intimidation from peers who are at higher grade level. The majority of these overage learners ends up dropping out of school. They view classroom activities as childish and therefore they may not participate especially in the group

discussion. Some of them display some form of rudeness to teachers, prefects and other workers in the school. They may also recruit young learners into delinquent behavior.

The EARC is charged with the responsibility of placement of students with hearing impairments. They are expected to carry out assessment on learners in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team so as to come up with the right judgment.

The researcher engaged the respondents in eliciting their feelings on awareness of the roles of EARC. The questionnaire for headteachers had a question on awareness of EARC services and the role they play in the placement of learners.

The three headteachers agreed on the following. They were aware of EARC roles but felt the multidisciplinary team did not exist, they did not see the EARC officer carry out effective follow-ups on learners placed in the school, and teachers were not invited to be form part of the assessment team they only received learners.

The same item was posed to teachers who participated in the interview. The following were their responses.

Teacher A; *I am aware of the EARC services as well as what we read in our unit courses during the training by KISE. I have never visited a center to have hands-on experience on how assessment is done. However, I have heard that it should have a multidisciplinary team which is composed of social workers, and nurses. SNE teacher, speech therapists. I don't think we have such in our centers* Teacher B; *I only receive learners in the class and most cases I do not know how they were assessed. Sometimes as I continue interacting with the learner I realize the learner is wrongly placed as some just required some simple modification in their regular school especially preferential sitting.* Teacher C; *I am aware of EARC services and its composition in terms of staffing. However, I do not know whether our centers have the required team to help ensure objectivity in judgment on the disability and right treatment. I understand most of the centers are not operational. Most of the CSO SNEs are given other responsibilities mostly focusing on regular learners as opposed to concentrating on; learners with special needs especially those with hearing impairment.*

Parents were key informants as they were charged with the responsibility of taking their children for assessment. The researcher sought to inquire from them about their awareness of EARC and its services. The following were responses from the parents during the interview.

Parent A; *I was not aware of the EARC till I was referred by a teacher who handled my child in a regular school. They are also too far Parents have to travel for many kilometers before reaching the assessment center. I have a friend who travels for around five hundred kilometers to reach the nearest centre. The parent had to spend a night outside with the child. It is too heavy on us. I wish people could understand what we go through together with our children.* Parent B; *I was made aware of the EARC by a friend who had a child with such a problem as my child. I was attended to by an officer who gave me a letter to present to school of students with hearing impairment. I did not understand the content of the letter which I was given from the centre. I was only advised to present it to the school of the placement. I think we parents we are supposed to get clear information on the process of the placement of our children and the expectations should be made clear to avoid ambush.* Parent C; *I was referred to the EARC by a relative who works in the same building where EARC services are offered. My child was assessed and I was referred to this school.*

EARC is charged with the responsibility of assessing and placing learners with disabilities in various education sets up. The responses from headteachers, teachers, and parents on the

awareness of the EARC services revealed that headteachers and teachers are aware of the existence of the EARC and the services they should be offering however they are not aware of the exact and available composition of multidisciplinary team engaged in assessment. Parents suggested that they were not aware of the existence of EARC and its role. They were only referred to by others after they were advised to seek their services. From the perusal of several documents relating to the placement of learners through assessment, many referrals to the centres were made through the teacher from a regular school and friends. The research by Hellen (2019) revealed that in Kajiado County, the EARC had no personnel trained in the area of hearing impairment who could offer effective and unbiased assessments for placement purposes.

Lack of the right personnel during assessment may lead to wrong placement. Learners who are wrongly placed may not participate well in education matters due to stigmatization leading to low self-esteem. From the interviews conducted to parents, many are not aware of the existence of EARC and the services offered in the center. Lack of knowledge on the existence of EARC and its role has led to many parents keeping their children at home for many years past age of admission in school. Many have sought help from other sources on the way forward for their children with hearing impairments like visiting diviners. Visits to such people do not offer any education solutions to their children. Many parents also go through a period of denial for a long time that they have a child with hearing impairments at such they keep their children home for a long time at home. If these parents are aware of the existence of EARC and its services, they can be taken through counseling sessions to overcome the denial and then seek admission to school for their children at an early stage in life thus helping these learners be in school at the same time with their hearing peers. Joining school at the right age helps in dimasfying low self-esteem which arises from joining school late.

It was a point of interest for the researcher to get views from respondents on the challenges that could be facing EARC as center which is crucial in the placement of students with hearing impairments. The headteachers' questionnaire had an item to solicit responses on this topic. The three headteachers had a commonality in their feedback: EARC lacked adequate personnel, Centers are too far thus hindering accessibility, inadequate modern tools and equipment needed for assessment, and knowledge on operating assessment tools and equipment where they are available.

Teachers interviewed on the same topic had the following to say

Teacher A; Most parents who are the users of the service are not aware of its existence. The many that I have interacted with confessed that they were never aware of its existence. This made many parents remain with their hearing-impaired learners at home for a long period. Many had enrolled their children in private schools with the hope that disability would diminish only to realize when it was too late. I think EARC centers should be publicized as part of learning institutions. Teacher B; I feel there could be an issue with staffing at the assessment centre where a multidisciplinary team is needed to come up with an objective judgment about the placement of a learner. The EARC I know of is manned by a CSO SNE who was trained in KISE. He has not gone for any further training on assessment procedures. I feel this is not adequate to make one qualify as an assessor in the EARC. Teacher C; The CSO sne may not be able to diagnose all the problems in hearing-impaired learners. Some equipment requires somebody well-trained to handle them. Other centers lack the necessary equipment and therefore refer parents and children to hospitals for assessment. This increases the cost to a parent.

Parents were of great interest in the services offered by the EARC as they are the consumers of the services together with their children. The researcher through an interview sought views from parents on the challenges they felt faced by the EARC that could be hindering their utilization of the facility. The parents had the following to report

Parent A; *The centers are located far from the parents' reach. I have to travel for several kilometers to reach the nearest center. In fact, our colleague's parents have narrated how they had to travel many kilometers before reaching the nearest assessment centre, a parent talked of four hundred kilometers. I feel this is too much Many children are lying at home as parents remain confused about what next move to take in education for his/her disadvantaged child. A parent narrated to me how he had to postpone severally a visit to the assessment center because she had to wait until she accumulated good money to cater for fare and accommodation on the way.* Parent B; *The EARC center I visited had only one officer. I was referred to a hospital for further assessment and to a certain school which was so many kilometers away from our home. Further assessment meant more spending on money which is not usually available. The school that I was advised to place the learner was also too far. I did not like it. I knew it was to drain me so much financially but I had no alternative but to agree since I also love education. I hope the sacrifice I am making will bear good fruits after my child completes education.* Parent C; *I was not aware of the existence of such services. So I took a very long time to visit such a center. My child even advanced in age. The school where my child was placed was too far from my reach. I would have preferred a school near home. It would reduce traveling costs. My child joined this school when she was twelve years old believe if I had done early assessment, I would have her placed at an early age. She would complete her secondary education early enough like her peers. But I am not losing hope. She will complete it and one day we will be happy.*

The current study collected views from the respondents on the challenges that could be facing EARC which is charged with the responsibility of placing assessed learners. From the above responses, it is clear that EARC faces several challenges which pose hindrances in the execution of their duties. The challenges faced as reported by respondents were: inadequate personnel, EARC facilities located too far from the clients, lack of required tools and equipment for assessment, inadequate awareness of its existence, inadequately trained personnel to handle the equipment, and schools for placement being too far for learners and parents to reach. Such statements were incongruent with the findings by Ayabei (2020) in her study on the analysis of functions and challenges facing education assessment in Kenya assessment centers faced challenges of inadequate personnel, centers located far and lack of adequate schools for placing learners after the assessment.

In her study, she also included other challenges like inadequate funding for facilitation in seminars, geographical barriers, inadequate level of collaboration with other stakeholders, large areas to be covered by the EARC officers, Language barriers between the professionals, guardians, and special needs children, lack of acoustic room and stigma to parents.

Bill and Taylor (2022) postulate that for EARC to function properly, all the relevant personnel should be available. Based on the stated challenges facing our EARC, chances are that proper and credible assessment may not be adequately done. Ineffective assessment may lead wrong placement of learners. The lack of adequate schools for the placement of learners interferes with education participation. In the current study, it was revealed that some learners were to travel for about five hundred kilometers to access the nearest school for students with hearing impairments. Such a learner may get discouraged from joining school due to separation from parents whom the learner feels they are too far. Long distances from home to school and vice

versa contribute to an increasing in the cost of education due to transport costs. EARC centers are also few thus limiting the access by parents.

Due to the cost of traveling to far places searching for the EARC services, some parents may opt to keep their children away from school or just present their children directly to school thus missing the process of assessment which is the determinant of placement. Some EARC facilities missing equipment like audiometers recommends referrals to parents to other institutions for further assessment. A referral is accompanied by some cost and most parents may opt not to proceed with a referral. They may choose to remain with their children at home thus denying them a chance to join school together with their peers where they would participate in education. Some resurface later after a long period and are placed in an institution when they are elderly for their class. The study by Desalegen (2020) found that most learners with hearing impairment were placed in school without assessment.

Where inadequate and ineffective assessment is done, placement of learners is also wrongly done. The current study sought to explore from the respondents some of the effects of wrong assessment leading to wrong placement. The headteachers' questionnaire captured an item on the effects of wrong placement. The three headteachers highlighted effects such as the development of low self-esteem by learner learners becoming bullied and isolated where they feel they are different from the group.

The teachers interviewed had the following to add on the topic of the effect of wrong placement.

Teacher A; *Learners wrongly placed develop behavior problems like bullying their friends. They sometimes consider themselves as superior. They sometimes disobey their prefects especially when they view them as being different.* Teacher B; *Such a learner may miss learning experiences as the teacher tends to concentrate on the majority who seems to be homogeneous. I find it easier to plan for learners who are on the same level. There was a girl who turned out to be hearing after being placed as a hearing-impaired learner. This to me meant that I have to engage much talking as opposed to the use of sign language. I found this situation disadvantaging the learner with deafness. We later organized for rerouting back to regular school since here we do not teach Kiswahili but KSL. We realized the learner would get disadvantaged even in the placement to secondary school.* Teacher C; *Planning for a learner who is on the far extreme from the average learners tends to be difficult for the teacher an extreme learner is a class on its own*

From the responses put across by the study participants, the wrong placement of learners posed a lot of challenges which included the development of low self-esteem, isolation, and creation of difficult experiences for teachers especially in planning. One of the focus group members narrated their experiences with learners who are wrongly placed in that they become bullies to their classmates and schoolmates as they consider themselves superior. *Such learners do not cooperate even during general cleaning; they disobey the class prefects and house parents. It's like they also notice that they are misplaced and therefore vent out their frustrations through other people in the compound.* Pointed out another member. Self-esteem helps in developing confidence in a learner which is crucial for effective participation in education. A learner who lacks confidence becomes reluctant even in attempting tasks provided to them. The learner is expected in most cases to work together as a team, especially during group discussions. A learner who is isolated will miss out on activities that require input from their friends through discussion

Assessment and placement of students with hearing impairments need to be effectively and adequately done. The researcher sought to find out from the respondents how EARC facilities should be improved for effective assessment and placement of students with hearing impairments. The questions to elicit responses were put across in the questionnaire for headteachers, and interview schedule for parents and teachers. The three headteachers had the following responses in common: construction of more EARC facilities to promote accessibility, employment of more personnel, provision of modern equipment, and creativity awareness on the existence of EARC facilities and their roles.

The teachers interviewed had the following views from the interview conducted.

Teacher A; *I feel that teachers need to be trained in assessment procedures and be involved during an assessment of learners. Continuous engagement of teachers will help them gain experience. They can form a great team for assessing learners. Their impact can be felt as they are the ones who mostly interact with many learners. They can also help in the early identification of learners even in the rural setup.* Teacher B; *EARC facilities need to be fully equipped with the modern machines and handlers of those machines to be trained. I feel as a teacher technology has so much advanced in all aspects of life and I believe even in the area of assessment of learners with hearing impairment. I am aware that assessment centers lack modern assessment tools and those available chances are that they are not functional think the use of wrong assessment tools and equipment may lead to misdiagnosis on the nature and magnitude of the hearing loss affecting the learner.* Teacher C; *Many people with professional qualifications in assessment should be employed in the EARC facilities. We need social workers, and therapists in addition to well-trained teachers*

Parents interviewed during the interview session had the following to say.

Parent A; *Awareness about the existence of EARC services should be made so that we as parents we can take our children for assessment early enough. Engagement of community stakeholders like wazee wa nyumba kumi can serve the purpose in this area because they are aware of the children born in their area of jurisdiction.* Parent B; *More assessment centers should be constructed to help promote accessibility. My colleague's parents have to travel many kilometers before reaching the next assessment centre. Also, placement centers are not many. So assessment is not a guarantee the child can access education. Am sure many parents have kept their children at home.* ParentC; *I think more personnel should be employed to help avoid unnecessary referrals. Further referrals lead to additional costs. Sometimes money is not available to make all these visits. We also have other limitation that hinders us from embracing referrals. With more personnel, this could be a big relief to us.*

The above responses indicate the need for making necessary improvements in assessment and placement. The suggestions from the respondents were: establishment of more centers for assessment, more personnel to be deployed in the center, availing of adequate and modern equipment, creation of awareness on the existence of EARC facilities, training on assessment and placement procedures, more funding and more schools for placing learners after assessment. The policy for special education (2009) as outlined on the role of EARC includes making referrals, counseling, establishing special schools, training, and mobilizing parents on the issues of special needs in children assessment. When the above are fully looked into, the EARC facilities will be able to execute their mandate effectively and have learners well assessed and placed in the best option possible. The Rwanda government developed a policy for ensuring that learners with special needs are identified and appropriately placed at all educational levels.

5.0 Conclusion

The EARC which is charged with the responsibility of assessing and placing learners with hearing impairments is faced with challenges, especially the lack of adequate personnel, distance, and few schools for placement of learners after assessment. Some learners could be wrongly placed. Wrong placement of a learner leads to poor participation of a learner in a segregated setup. Over-age learners are not comfortable in primary schools.

6.0 Recommendations

The current study found that EARC being charged with the responsibilities of assessing and placing learners in the appropriate option faced some challenges that needed to be addressed. The following were some recommendations made. Parents should be made aware of the existence of EARC and its role. Learners should be assessed early enough to avoid placement of overage learners in lower grades. The EARC should be staffed with the right and adequate personnel for effective assessment. The government should fund EARC so that the staff can effectively carry its role of sensitization and mobilization in a wide area thus helping in early identification, assessment, and placement. Special schools for placement of learners after assessment are few therefore the government should consider constructing more schools for reach by parents. They can also consider improving on inclusion policy so that students with hearing impairments can be placed in the nearest school from home. The EARC should be increased for easy access by the client.

Modern adequate and functional materials and tools for assessment should be availed in EARC for effective diagnosis and avoidance of referral which increases cost to the parents and guardians. After placement in school learners should receive a curriculum that is not overloaded. The books provided to them should have reduced wording and utilize more visual aids than audio aids.

Classrooms for students with hearing impairments should be soundproof to avoid echoes when being taught. The community in school should KSL as it is the key mode of communication among students with hearing impairments. Such factors in the placement if implemented will positively influence education participation for students with hearing impairments Education for students with hearing impairments should be made free and compulsory by the government.

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